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Vol. IX, No. 3

J. S. WILLIAMS, Editor

May, 1934

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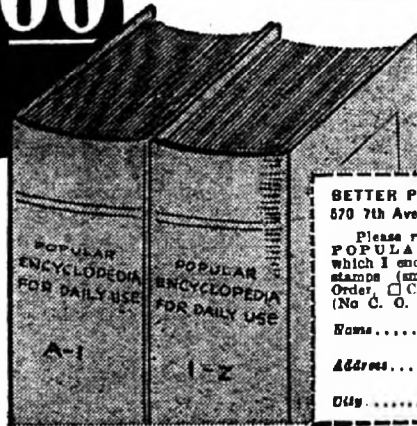
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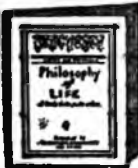
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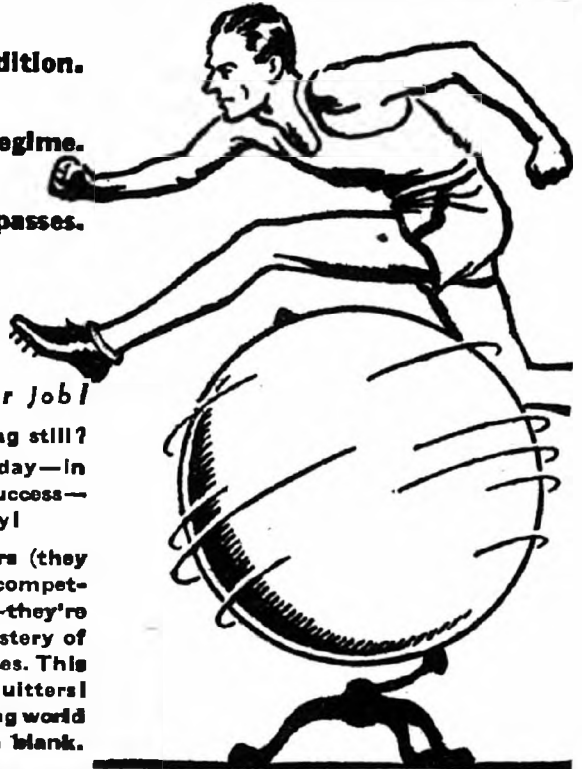
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Colbert hit the powdery sand, Bennet

The Devil's

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Hours of Hell

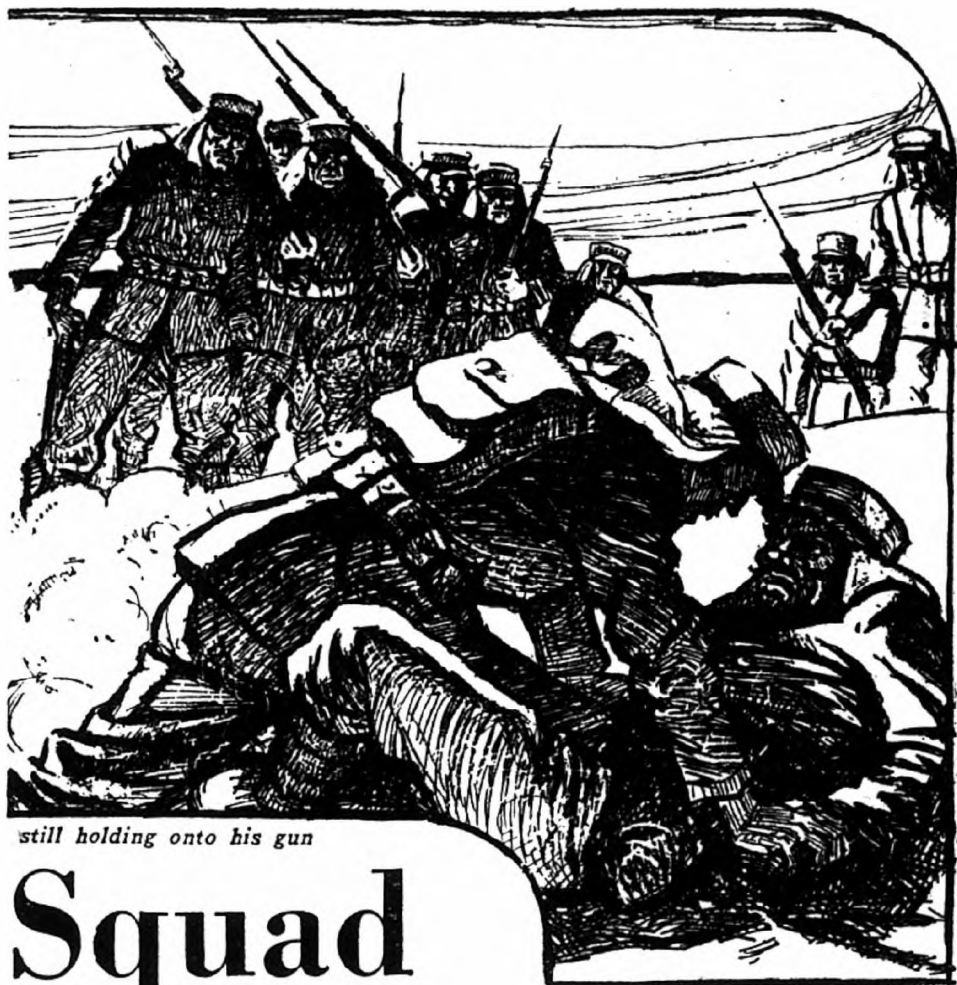
By CHARLES

Author of "Evidence,"

LIKE a huge snake, the thin column of the Legion wound its way across the hot floor of the desert. No march formation now, no military precision—simply sixty fatigue-poisoned men dragging heavy boots across the hot sand. Another hundred yards, another, still another—dumbly driving their aching bodies on, though their minds were drugged with weariness.

Even a wolf can feel fatigue: the men had been marching for eight consecutive hours now. Marching over sand which burned through the quarter-inch soles of their boots; beneath a desert sun which in a few minutes could kill the man who defied it without headgear; through

Deathless Valor and Nefarious Treachery Side



still holding onto his gun

Squad

Length Novel

GREEN

"Black Docks," etc.

choking dust, blinding glare, stifling, maddening heat. Eight hours of it. Eight hours of hell—all the more maddening because necessity hadn't prompted it. Lieutenant Colbert had chosen to sleep astride his gray mule. He was commanding officer of the company. Until he deigned to awaken

and call a halt, the company marched.

Sergeant Bennet, walking abreast of the column, wiped the caked sweat and grime out of his eyes, and dispassionately cursed the officer. He had been doing both for hours—and one was as futile as the other. The heat wrung fresh sweat out of his system.

Colbert continued to sleep on the gray mule which brought up the rear of the column.

The squad on the sergeant's right kept alive a steady stream of profanity—thus differing from the others,

by Side in the Ranks of the Foreign Legion!



Bennet

who walked with the passive air of driven cattle. The six men cursed Colbert openly, in a half-dozen different languages.

And Bennet made no effort to check them. First,

because he knew the men; and second, because they voiced only what was in his own heart. He listened, sometimes smiling grimly.

IT had been his own squad until recently, and Bennet had contributed to the mad exploits which had earned it its name—the Devil's Squad. Appropriately named, too, for the six men comprising it—Legionnaires Saratof, Fernandez, Henderson, Hauser, Blitzky and Larson—had reputations extending far beyond their own outpost. Reputations for sheer deviltry, for cold-blooded courage, for ability to sneer in the face of man, God or devil.

Only constant trouble with marauding Arabs had postponed court-martial and Penal Battalions for each. As fighters, the entire Legion hadn't their equal; so the officers cursed them, and with black optimism shoved them into every expedition where Arab bullets might do a more final and efficient job than any court-martial.

Bennet hung close to the squad now, knowing full well that should any trouble flare up, it would find there its source.



Colbert

Legionnaire Fernandez touched Bennet's arm. He said abruptly, through heat-cracked lips, jerking his thumb over his shoulder:

"He sleeps, Sergeant. He sleeps well. But even better shall he sleep when my knife finds his throat some night. By my patron Saint, I swear it!"

It was a long speech for Legionnaire Fernandez, a black-skinned Spaniard who spoke rarely and then only to spit a curse; a strange, silent man who was wanted for murder in Barcelona and for another in Marseilles and a third in Palermo; but who, nevertheless, carried a silver crucifix in his knapsack and a tiny gold cross around his neck, and mumbled, fingering a rosary, humble words before going to bed each night.

"All right," Bennet said curtly, "enough of that!"

"Nevertheless," the Spaniard insisted, though deferentially, "I have sworn!"

Legionnaire Henderson, at his right, growled—out of a twisted mouth which was a souvenir of Portsmouth Prison:

"No, you won't! And know why? 'Cause I'll bloody well beat you to it."

"I said," Bennet repeated — "enough!"

THE bragging, blustering little Cockney, who feared nothing on God's earth, would have told another non-commissioned officer to go to the devil. But he obeyed Bennet. Something about the brown-faced American—his quiet gray eyes, his unhurried, even way of speaking—commanded respect.

And so more minutes dragged, interminably long. Bennet could feel the heat now at his throat, like a huge strangling hand. They could not continue much longer without rest. Already he could see men ahead swaying, reeling as they drove their bodies across the furnace-like floor of the desert.

Even the grumbling and cursing

ceased in the Devil's Squad. Breath became precious to tortured lungs.

And whenever Bennet would look back at the gray mule, Lieutenant Colbert's body would still be in the same position, slumped forward, swaying slightly with the motion of the animal.

"Damn him!" Bennet said aloud.

THERE came sudden confusion in the ranks at his right. Bennet jerked his body around. Legionnaire Hauser, a blond German giant who measured six-foot-five from the peak of his kepi to the soles of his boots—which the Government of France had been forced to make to order for him, and who weighed two hundred and seventy pounds even after three years in the Legion, stumbled suddenly. He fell flat on his face.

Bennet saw that the German had stumbled over the body of a man in the squad ahead who had fainted. Hauser got up slowly. He picked up the unconscious Legionnaire, turned to Bennet.

"*Gott im Himmel*, Sergeant, how much longer?"

The German spoke respectfully, for his biggest interest in life was a dog-like devotion to the American sergeant. Nevertheless, his blue eyes were blazing now. Other angry voices joining his. Grimy fists shaking in the air. Fierce, sweating faces.

"How much longer?"

Bennet shrugged. Abruptly, he made up his mind.

"We halt here," he said quietly. He blew two shrill blasts on his whistle, then waved his arms. "Ten minutes, men!"

The column disintegrated as men dropped in their tracks. Ten minutes! Ten precious minutes of rest. Bennet himself felt his knees trembling suddenly. He dropped on the hot sand. Legionnaire Saratof, a burly Russian, caught his eyes. The

Russian leaned forward.

"A Good Samaritan act, my friend," he drawled, "but one that will get you into trouble, I fear. There is nothing the lieutenant would love more than to have your head."

Bennet nodded grimly. He was friendly with the Russian, respecting the fact that Saratof had once worn the uniform of the Imperial White Army, with many decorations across his broad chest and thousands of men under his command. An intelligent man in spite of brutish bulk, the Russian was Bennet's companion when memories became unbearable and required many glasses of pinard, the sour red wine of Algiers, to drown their bitterness.

"I am perfectly aware of that," Bennet murmured.

He rolled a brown cigarette, lighted it, then glanced thoughtfully at the rear of the column. He had had no authority to call a halt, but the mule had stopped of its own accord and Colbert was still asleep. The officer would not know of the intermission in the march.

BENNET relaxed, and permitted his mind the luxury of lingering on the delicious coolness of the *estaminet* at Tel-av-Ris. Cool and dark. Beer! Foaming cold beer—and old Jorin's girl whose eyes were pools of light, to help one drink it. . . All things, good or bad, eventually come to an end. Only thirty kilometers now to



Fernandez



Abdul el Ras

the outpost. Then—Saratof nudged him, breaking the reverie.

"The little toad has opened his eyes." The Russian spoke out of the corner of his mouth. "You're in for a bit of hell, Sergeant."

BENNET turned carelessly. He grinned. Saratof had made a perfect simile. The man astride the gray mule approaching them, crouching forward, his short, pudgy body both swaying and bouncing with the movements of the animal, did resemble a hopping toad. His round, fleshy red face, with a loose, thick-lipped mouth and bulging eyes, contributed to the illusion. Lieutenant Colbert, who lived in a world of hatred, and breathed only because the Republic of France stood behind his rank.

Abreast of the sergeant, he yanked savagely on the reins. Bennet stood up. As ever, he met Colbert's glare calmly, coolly. They stared at each other: Colbert breathing heavily, poisonous hatred in his eyes; the tall, brown-faced sergeant cool, relaxed, contemptuously respectful.

He was the better man. He knew it. The men knew it. And the soul of Colbert suspected it.

Colbert slapped his hand on the pommel. He yelled, leaning forward; his voice, thick with anger, carried in the desert stillness to the resting men:

"*Nom de nom*, who is in command of this company, Sergeant?"

"You are, *mon* Lieutenant!" Bennet replied calmly.

"Then what is the meaning of this?" Colbert waved his stump-like arms. "Have I called a halt?"

Bennet shrugged. "The Lieutenant was asleep. The men had been marching eight hours. It is hot."

"And so you acted upon your own authority."

"I only anticipated," Bennet said

wearily, "what, I was sure, would have been the Lieutenant's own wishes."

Colbert lowered his voice. "It still pleases you to take the initiative, does it not, Sergeant? It brings back memories perhaps, *hein?* Of a certain captain, perhaps, in the American army, who had got drunk once too often and had been kicked out because he disgraced the name of officer? And so, while I sleep, you imagine—" He laughed softly, his eyes searching Bennet's face. "You *imagine!*"

"I see," Bennet drawled, "the Lieutenant has amused himself by tracing my record. May I remind the Lieutenant that one may fail as an officer and still remain a man? And that one may remain an officer and fail as a *man?* Or—perhaps that's what's worrying the Lieutenant—one may fail at both?"

A REDDISH purple, for which the sun was not responsible, crept into Colbert's face. He opened his mouth, closed it, his teeth clicking. His body jerked forward. Blue steel flashed in the sunlight.

With one tigerish leap, Bennet crossed the six feet between them. Arms outstretched, his right shoulder hit Colbert as the heavy automatic cracked viciously, disturbing the desert stillness. Steel fingers closed on the officer's wrist before he had a chance to swing the gun around.

A savage twist—and Colbert came flying out of the saddle. He hit the powdery sand, Bennet still holding on to his gun, and writhed there like a wounded snake. The Legionnaires, now no longer numb with fatigue, were figures of stone.

Bennet's left hand caught Colbert's free wrist as the officer attempted a vicious blow to his groin. Cursing, snarling like a wild beast, Colbert



"I have sworn by my patron saint, I shall see your blood!"

tried to fight loose. He was a child in the tall sergeant's hands. His body writhing on the fine sand whipped up a thick cloud of dust. Both were enveloped in it—a swirling gray mantle, blotting out for them even the white glare of the hellish sun overhead.

Colbert relaxed suddenly. Slowly, the dust settled. Again the pitiless white glare. His eyes bloodshot, saliva trickling down the side of his mouth, Colbert stared at Sergeant Bennet's brown, impassive face.

"You American scum!" he panted. "Release my wrists!"

Bennet read Colbert's mind. It was

not difficult. He did not have to look twice into the officer's blood-shot eyes to know what would happen the instant the hand holding the automatic was freed.

Colbert would kill him. Unhesitatingly, instantly. Would jerk the trigger of the big automatic, once, twice, three times. Hot slugs tearing through flesh. Then—a meal for the desert vultures, and bones bleaching under the sun. . . .

And Colbert would return to the outpost with an eloquent story of insubordination, attempted mutiny, assault upon an officer. He'd get away with it, too—though there were sixty

witnesses to the murder. A Legionnaire testifying against an officer—Bennet smiled crookedly.

"*Sacre de nom,*" Colbert screamed, "*will you release my wrists?*"

Again Bennet thought of bones bleaching under the hot sun. His lower jaw bulged out stubbornly.

"Yes," he said, "after I do—this!"

Swiftly, he let go Colbert's left wrist, swung his hand around. He wrenched the automatic from the stubby fingers clutching it. Stepped back, his long shadow sliding on the sand, he waited quietly.

CHAPTER II

Oath of the Squad

FOR a moment, Colbert lay perfectly still, resting on his left elbow, his fleshy face bestial in its animal fury—distorted, twisted, glistening with sweat. He reminded Bennet of a Gila sunning on a rock.

The officer controlled himself. Stood up leisurely, brushed the dust from his uniform. He faced the Legionnaires resting on the hot sand.

"Attention!" he barked. "March formation."

He was obeyed instantly, for, having snapped the order, he ceased to be a personality; he became commanding officer of the detachment. The men moved like puppets. In thirty seconds, the company stood as a unit—sixty men stiff at attention.

Bennet, looking at the long column of twos, felt curiously detached. No longer part of the unit now. He stood alone. Sand, sky, heat, the vast space of the desert and the incredible stillness—it suddenly got under his skin. Seemed unreal, somehow—a hallucination.

Colbert's orders, barked rapidly one after another, swiftly destroyed the illusion. A grim significance in the

chain of commands. The first eight men in the column dropped out. Formed a line, facing Bennet. Another command from Colbert—and they unslung their short Lebel carbines. Eight rifle butts jerked to eight shoulders.

"An execution," thought Bennet. "My own execution."

His fingers tightened on the butt of the automatic. Bennet knew everyone of the eight men facing him. Knew why they avoided meeting his eyes. Knew that, while his chest was in the sights of their rifles, they were cursing themselves, cursing Colbert. But—they would pull the triggers. They would obey orders.

And then, quite calmly, Bennet made up his mind. *Nine* shots would follow the command to fire. Colbert would order his own execution. For Bennet meant to send him to hell a split second before the eight rifles shuffled out his life. . . .

Colbert, who stood between the firing squad and Bennet, took three steps to the left. He turned on his heels, snapped his body to attention.

"Sergeant Bennet," he said coldly, "you will toss the automatic you're holding at—my feet. Do so immediately!"

AGAIN Bennet read the officer's mind. The firing squad was merely incidental — stage scenery. Colbert intended it to be a one-man execution. He hadn't for a moment meant to forego the pleasure of personally killing the brown-faced American he hated—hated because he could not break him.

"*Now!*" Bennet said to himself. "I ought to let him have it now."

And then both turned at the sound of heavy boots swishing on the sand. It was Hauser, the blond German giant, who had detached himself from the column and was now leisurely approaching Bennet. Hauser

carried his rifle—a toy gun in his big hands. At Bennet's side, he turned. Grim defiance was in his blue eyes as he faced the eight men who formed the firing squad.

Colbert opened his mouth. He never said what he meant to say. He whirled at the sound of more footsteps on the sand. Another man had left the ranks, followed by two more. And then still two more. Saratof, Henderson, Blitzky, Fernandez, Larson—the Devil's Squad, leaving the ranks to back their ex-member, putting to test the oath they had sworn in the rear room of the *estaminet* at Tel-av-Ris.

ONE by one, each of the five men joined Hauser and Bennet. None spoke—and words weren't necessary. It was open mutiny. And Bennet felt a choking sensation in his throat. The six men were risking their lives to save his.

They weren't defying Colbert, who had ceased to matter as a personality. They were defying his uniform, his rank. The rank behind which stood the terrible discipline of the Legion, and was supported by the mailed fist of all France. . . .

A new quality to the desert stillness now. Men charged it with hot tenseness. Bennet looked up, and Colbert, staring at him, unconsciously followed suit. A black speck high above them, almost stationary against the hot blue of the sky. A desert vulture, uncannily knowing somehow and waiting up there—the envoy of death.

Colbert tugged at the collar of his tunic. He roared abruptly:

"What is the meaning of this, you dogs? Return to your ranks!"

His voice lacked conviction. Henderson grinned openly. He was a grenade man, and his left hand was inside the canvas bag holding a dozen of the deadly little bombs. For all

Colbert knew, the little Cockney's fingers might even then be withdrawing the firing pin from one of them. A matter of a fraction of a second to toss the bomb at the officer's feet.

Larson, a big, raw-boned Swede, had his automatic rifle tilted at a significant angle. He could swing it off his shoulder and begin spraying steel-jacketed bullets almost as quickly as one could draw a revolver.

The rifle in Hauser's big hands, in Blitzky's—the finest marksman of the company—the automatic in Bennet's right hand. And none of the men was bluffing. They could—and would—summon death with the touch of their fingers.

All of which Colbert saw and knew. And so did the eight men whose rifles were still trained on Bennet's chest.

SARATOF spoke—quietly, but his voice carried. He addressed the men of the squad facing them.

"Is it worth it, comrades? The blood of many to please the whim of one? If that one must have death, let it be his own. And no mother has given birth to anyone who more deserved it."

Again Colbert tugged at the collar of his tunic. The burly Russian had carried his point. As the officer looked from one wind-tanned face to another, he read his doom. He had made a sea of hatred; he would drown in it now.

Fernandez nudged Bennet. Then the Spaniard jerked his right hand to his left sleeve.

"We," he said, his black eyes glittering, "have made camp for the night. Lieutenant Colbert is asleep in his tent. An Arab, crawling on the floor of the desert, slips through the sentries. He is holding a knife—so!"

His fingers drew away from the sleeve. They held something that

glittered in the sunlight—a long, thin stiletto.

"The Arab—he crawls into Lieutenant Colbert's tent. He raises his knife—so!"

"No!" Colbert screamed.

BENNET caught the Spaniard's wrist. He gave it a sharp twist. Fernandez dropped the knife. There was a film over his eyes now, and his body trembled.

"Let me go, Sergeant!" he hissed. "I have sworn by my patron Saint I shall see his blood!"

Bennet began to shake him. Out of the corner of his eyes, he saw Henderson leap forward.

"Where are you going?" Bennet snapped.

The Cockney showed his pointed teeth.

"I said I'd bloody well beat him to it. Hold on to the crazy Spick, Sergeant—and watch a show you ain't *never* goin' to forget."

"No!" Colbert screamed again. "*Mon Dieu—no!*"

In Colbert's eyes now shone the terror of a wild animal that has just felt the steel jaws of a trap bite its leg.

For Henderson was brandishing a grenade. The Cockney held the bomb high in his right hand, about to throw it.

Colbert turned suddenly. He began to run, wildly, madly, across the sand. Henderson threw the bomb. There came the dull detonation of the explosion. A column of sand leaped into the air. Lingered a moment, dissolved.

Henderson laughed shrilly. He had deliberately thrown the bomb wide.

Bennet shook off the paralyzing inertia which had gripped him. He released Fernandez, then ran toward Henderson. The Cockney, seeing him coming, stopped, whirled.

"Stop that, you crazy fool!" Bennet panted.

The Cockney crouched. He was holding another grenade now.

"That's my party, Sergeant," he snarled. "Keep your blasted nose out of it."

"Put that grenade away!" Bennet commanded levelly.

Henderson crooked his finger through the iron loop in the bomb.

"Another step, Sergeant, and, by Blimey, I'll send you to hell with him!"

Bennet's brown face did not change expression. Walking slowly now, he continued to advance upon Henderson.

"I warn you, Sergeant," the Cockney yelled. "Another step—"

Bennet said nothing. With the same measured, even pace he continued approaching Henderson. The fifty feet between them were cut to forty, thirty. A peculiar fascination crept into Henderson's eyes as he watched the tall Sergeant advancing toward him.

Twenty feet from the Cockney, Bennet threw quietly over his shoulder:

"Never mind that, Hauser."

THE big German, who had had his carbine at his shoulder, lowered it slowly, blank amazement on his face. Bennet hadn't looked behind him. It was simply a guess—

With the same unhurried air which characterized his approach, Bennet swung his body to the right when he finally stood before Henderson. His right fist whipped out. It landed on the side of the Cockney's jaw.

The little Englishman staggered backward, sat down abruptly. He stared up at Bennet, the grenade still in his fist.

"I said," Bennet repeated softly, "put that grenade away!"

Henderson obeyed instantly. He looked up again, half-grinning.

"Yes, Gov'nor," he said in English. "And there ain't another man wot could myke me do it, either."

"Thanks," said Bennet. "Now get back to your ranks." He turned, and his gesture embraced the other members of the Devil's Squad. "That goes for you too, men. Back to your ranks!"

And again Bennet was obeyed instantly.

COLBERT approached him. The officer's face was dull red, and he was nervously rubbing together the palms of his hands.

"Sergeant Bennet," he said pompously, though his voice was still unsteady, "your coming to my assistance as you have will speak well for you at the—"

He checked himself abruptly, looked around nervously.

"Is the Lieutenant," Bennet asked quietly, "thinking of court-martial when we return to the outpost?"

"No," Colbert replied quickly—"certainly not."

"I am glad," said Bennet. "I am glad that the Lieutenant realizes that the sun sometimes can do strange things to the minds of men, at which time they are not responsible for their actions. Does the Lieutenant understand?"

A brief pause.

"Yes," Colbert said slowly, "I understand, Sergeant. There shall be no court-martial."

"Thank you, *mon* Lieutenant. You have done me the honor of investigating my record." Bennet lowered his voice. "Even to an *ex*-officer, mutiny is a thing of much ugliness. So the Lieutenant lives. But if I am permitted to make a suggestion, I would advise the Lieutenant to ask for a transfer immediately upon the return to the outpost."

"Implying what, Sergeant?"

"Men affected by the sun very often have a recurrence of the hallucinations which render them dangerous maniacs. I was only thinking of the Lieutenant's safety when I suggested—"

Another pause. Colbert stared at his fingertips, looked up.

"Yes, Sergeant," he said, "I see what you mean. I shall follow your suggestion."

Bennet's eyes narrowed. There was an expression on Colbert's face, in his voice, in his eyes—

"An officer," Bennet said softly, "being human, may have many faults. But his commission is a mockery and his uniform a joke if he is not a man of honor. The Lieutenant gives me his word?"

Now Colbert did not hesitate.

"My word of honor, Sergeant, that there shall be no court-martial and that I shall ask for an immediate transfer upon our return to the outpost."

But as Colbert's eyes met his, again Bennet caught that expression of sly mockery, subtly intermingled with that of treachery and hatred. Colbert could not, though he tried, completely disguise it.

BENNET forced himself to say, "Thank you, *mon* Lieutenant."

He handed Colbert his automatic and walked away cursing himself for a fool.

And, two minutes later, he was startled when Saratof voiced his own thoughts.

"A noble gesture, my friend," the burly Russian whispered, "but, nevertheless, you are a fool. You have trusted a cobra. It will bite and you shall die."

Bennet shrugged. "Granted. But I've been in the army too long, Saratof; it's in my blood now. Colbert is an officer—even as you and I

were, once. Somehow, one can't forget."

"Yet life is sweet."

"True."

"It still," the Russian said significantly, "isn't too late. A word to Henderson, say, and Colbert dies. Reconsider, my friend."

Bennet grinned mirthlessly.

"A habit of mine," he drawled, "always to play through my hand, as we say in America. So far I've been lucky."

"You'll lose this hand," said Saratof. "Because the cards are stacked against you, Sergeant."

"I'll gamble," Bennet said quietly.

CHAPTER III

Ambush

AGAIN the column snaked its way across the hot floor of the desert. The men were quiet now. The brief rest had temporarily driven off the paralyzing weariness; they now settled to the grim business of covering the remaining thirty kilometers to the outpost. Bennet walked mechanically. From force of habit, his eyes constantly combed the desert for any sign of Abdul el Ras and his gang of cut-throats who were supposed to be somewhere in the vicinity.

Neither Bennet nor Captain Renault, commanding officer of the French outpost who had sent the patrol out, expected the men to run into the Arabs, who were as elusive as the desert wind. But the interception of a caravan, with twenty-three men butchered, including two wealthy Englishmen, demanded some action. Hence the three-day desert patrol, over the last lap of which the Legionnaires were now marching.

The head of the column slowed up. It had reached the dividing line where the plain of sand ended abruptly and the cliffs began—a mad forma-

tion of grotesquely-shaped rocks, always reminding Bennet of the toy-land of giants. Some of the rocks reared their heads seventy feet into the air. They were interlaced with deep canyons, gulches, ravines which twisted crazily only to terminate at the base of some huge cliff.

Bennet raised his hand, then swept it to the left. To the men ahead his message was perfectly clear. Two ways of reaching the outpost from where they now paused. One, to cut straight through the rocks, following one of the canyons; the other to circumvent them completely, which would add several hours to the march. Bennet had chosen the latter.

The column swung into motion again—and then halted abruptly at two shrill whistles. Lieutenant Colbert, pounding the ribs of the mule with the heels of his boots, galloped up to Bennet.

"Again," he said coldly, "you are being presumptive, Sergeant. You might have consulted me. We're going straight through."

Bennet stared at him.

"Straight through?" he echoed.

"Yes."

BUT—but does the Lieutenant forget that the Arabs are known to be in the vicinity? If they have prepared an ambush along the main canyon cutting through—and chances are excellent that they might have—the company will be massacred to a man. Wiped out without even having a chance to put up a fight."

Colbert smiled slowly.

"I've thought of that, Sergeant. To avoid the unpleasant possibility you mention, I shall take the liberty of risking your neck. You will head the advance guard of one squad. I shall hold the column ten minutes before I follow you. If I hear gunfire, I shall turn back and use the route you have so kindly recommended. Pick

your men, Sergeant—and I do *not* wish you good luck!"

WITH a vicious jerk, Colbert swung the head of the mule around, returning to his place at the rear of the column. Bennet stared after him until he heard Saratof's voice.

"I warned you, my friend. You can't sit in a game where cards are stacked against you—and win!"

"All right, Saratof," Bennet replied curtly. "Orders are orders; you've been in the army long enough to realize that." He raised his voice. "Volunteers! I want—"

The Devil's Squad stepped out before Bennet had a chance to complete the sentence. A glance from Hauser, the giant German—and the men in the squads ahead who had aspirations to join the sergeant suddenly changed their minds. Bennet grinned.

"Let's go, men!"

Bennet in the lead, they skirted the head of the column. The heat struck them like a blow when they descended into the first of the ravines. No wind here. The stationary air, pregnant with heat, tore at their lungs.

And yet here, among the hot rocks, there was life. Brightly-colored lizards detached themselves abruptly from their hot perches, scurrying away with incredible speed. Snakes, some the thickness of a man's finger, others as wide across as a man's thigh. And once Bennet stepped aside to grind out with his heel a bloated scorpion.

But he was conscious of other life, more sinister, more deadly than the scorpion he had just killed. Human life. A purely intuitive feeling, yet it strengthened with every step he took. He felt certain that there were men nearby. Many men. Crouching among the rocks, ready rifles

thrust forward. Awaiting their prey.

The ravine widened. Now it joined the main canyon. Here the cliffs were steeper, bolder. In places, they were unbroken walls of granite, throwing black shadows clear across the canyon. So absolute was the silence, Bennet could hear the breathing of the men behind him. And whenever he glanced over his shoulder, he could see that their faces, too, were tense, grimly expectant.

Just short of an L turn in the canyon, Bennet stopped. He turned, waited a moment, rubbing thoughtfully the stubble of beard on his chin.

"Saratof," he said, unconsciously speaking in a whisper, "there is a little fable in America about a lost mule. The village idiot succeeded in finding it when everyone else failed. He said he imagined he was a mule, and then took a walk."

The burly Russian's eyes were very bright.

"Yes?"

Bennet poked his forefinger in Saratof's chest.

"Suppose you were Abdul el Ras. You knew the infidel dogs would follow this canyon on their return to their outpost. What would you do?"

"Make an ambush."

"Where?" Bennet asked tersely.

"Where the canyon takes the shape of a bottle-neck. It's an ideal place."

"You, Hauser?"

"Same place, Sergeant."

"You, Henderson?"

"Same."

"AND so would I," said Bennet. "But one needn't test whether a gun is loaded by looking into the barrel and pulling the trigger. There are other ways. Come on!"

He veered off the left. Here was a break in the rocky walls. A steep incline, but possible to be ascended;

Bennet dug the heels of his boots in the soft sand. They slid until they reached the rock beneath, then gripped. Foot by foot, he worked his way up, the others following.

"Softly," he cautioned.

BUT the continual little avalanche of sand and pebbles could not be helped. Reaching the top of the wall which formed the side of the canyon, Bennet led them still higher—up a second wall. Hot, hard work. Here they had to climb on hands and knees.

"All the way up, then to the right," Bennet panted to the men behind him. "That'll bring us to the highest point over the bottle-neck in the canyon. The *highest* point," he repeated significantly.

Gritting their teeth, their clothes soaked with perspiration, the men continued to climb. In a few minutes, they reached the top of the enormous cliff. It was as flat as a table-top, and perhaps three hundred yards across.

Bennet pointed at the far edge.

"That's where we want to go," he whispered. "But watch your feet, men. No noise."

They crossed the top of the cliff. Ten feet from the edge, Bennet dropped on his stomach. The others followed his example. He crawled to the very edge, looked over—and caught his breath.

They were about fifty feet above the section of the canyon which narrowed like a bottle-neck—or the middle part of an hour glass. The rocky walls on either side at that point were very low—fifteen feet or so.

And the ledge immediately below Bennet, overlooking the canyon, was white—white with the burnouses of hundreds of men.

The Arabs!

Lying on their bellies, perfectly

still, shoulder to shoulder, they resembled so many corpses awaiting a mass burial. The barrels of their long rifles were trained over the edge of the ledge. And so were the rifles of the prone men on the opposite ledge. Lying there on the hot rocks, in the blazing hot sun—

And then Bennet's eyes widened with horror. The column of Legionnaires swung around the bend into the bottle-neck. Swung around beneath those waiting rifles. Sixty men marching to their doom, the tri-colored flag of France fluttering gaily at the head of the column—

"Grenades, Henderson!" Bennet yelled hoarsely. "Quick, damn you!"

As he swung his rifle around and down, his eyes lingered for a moment on his wrist watch. Colbert had not waited ten minutes!

CHAPTER IV

Desert Massacre

IT was too late. The explosion of Henderson's grenade was lost in the first terrific volley from Arab rifles. The air rocked with sound. A huge, invisible scythe seemed to have ripped across the column of the Legion. Men dropped, clawing the sand.

Another volley. The column melted completely. Three hundred rifles pouring hot lead into a massed target fifteen feet below!

"A massacre," Bennet said to himself, his lips white.

Feverishly, he worked the bolt of his rifle. Blitzky at his left, Hauser at his right, also were working the bolts and triggers of their hot rifles. Anderson's automatic rifle chattered like a woodpecker gone mad.

But the Arabs ignored the hail of lead from above. Drunk with victory, they suddenly rose as a mass. Slid down the walls of the canyon to

finish with their long knives the dozen men still on their feet.

"*Illah Akbur!*"

THE fierce Moslem battle cry lingered for a drawn out second in the still air. And then another sound replaced it. A spine-tingling blood cry from the throats of the scores fighting with each other for the privilege of burying their knives into the skins of the dog infidels. And even above that cry, rose Henderson's voice.

"Colbert," he screamed—"he got away, blast his bloody hide!"

"What!" Bennet leaped to his feet. He suddenly realized, as Henderson did, that the gray mule hadn't followed the column around the bend. Colbert, probably half anticipating an ambush at that point, had lingered behind. When he heard the Arab rifles, he'd turned back.

A berserk fury suddenly possessed Bennet. Colbert hadn't held the column ten minutes as he promised. And so the blood of those sixty men was on his head. *He* had murdered them, and now he was the only one to escape the massacre—

"No, by God!" Bennet shouted. "I'll get that little rat if it's the last thing I do on this earth."

"Get him?" Saratof drawled softly.

"Yes," Bennet replied savagely. "But not the way you're thinking. I'll manhandle him, to use an old American term. Give him the beating of his life. And I don't give a damn if I stand court-martial for it. The blood of sixty men demands *some* retribution."

"I'm with you, Sergeant," Saratof grunted.

The expressions on the faces of the others were sufficient evidence of their agreement.

"Come on!" Bennet snapped.

He ran to the other edge of the cliff. Slid down to the ledge below

it. And to the one below that. A tooth-like projection in the rock, sharp as a knife, ripped the sleeve of his tunic. Hot blood now dissolved the caked sweat and grime. Bennet was not even aware of the wound.

Down he climbed, always edging to the right, recklessly taking suicidal chances on the sharp rocks. And then he saw something which spurred him to even greater effort.

"Easy, Sergeant!" Saratoff yelled when Bennet leaped six feet to a nine-inch ledge, a slip from which would have meant instant death on the rocks below. "You'll make it!"

"Yes." Bennet said grimly, "I'll make it!"

They were now over a section of the canyon some distance away from the L turn where the ambush had taken place. Sounds of fighting still drifted from there—yells, screams, an occasional shot. And from there, un-hurriedly, came Lieutenant Colbert on his gray mule. He had obviously lingered several minutes, out of the reach of the Arab rifle fire, and only now had decided to turn back.

BENNET slid down a ten-foot drop to another narrow ledge. He was now only a dozen feet above the bed of the canyon. He hugged the granite wall, waiting. Colbert continued coming, closer, closer. In a few seconds now he would pass below Bennet.

Bennet turned away from the wall. Crouched, ready for a leap. And then Colbert looked up suddenly. He saw Bennet, saw the expression on the tall sergeant's face—and desperately yanked on the reins of the mule, trying to veer away from the wall.

Bennet hurled his body forward. One hundred and eighty pounds of bone and muscle hit Colbert. Bore him off the saddle. The two men hit the powdery sand. They rolled,

over and over, until they were brought up short by the opposite wall.

Colbert fought desperately, clawing, scratching. Whimpering sounds came from his throat. Bennet ignored the blows rained on his face. He did not try to shake loose when Colbert sank his teeth in the loose skin at the base of his skull. Did not even feel the vicious knee jab to his groin. He knew what he wanted—and found it when his fingers closed around Colbert's thick neck.

HIS fingers tightened, thumbs burying themselves into the officer's windpipe. A hoarse scream burst from Colbert's lips, followed by a throaty gurgle. His eyes bulged out still further.

"You murdered sixty men," Bennet panted. "All right, damn you—"

The steel fingers tightened even more. Colbert's struggling became feebler. And then, warned by pure instinct, Bennet jerked away his hands. He swung his body to the right. A lightning-like movement, unconsciously timed to a fraction of a second. Colbert had jerked out his automatic. The heavy slug, which now ricocheted with a vicious whining sound off the granite wall, missed Bennet's heart by three inches.

And then death put her bony claw on Bennet's shoulder. Colbert was still only three feet away, but now there was that heavy automatic between them. Steady in Colbert's right hand, the little black hole centered on Bennet's chest. Fierce triumph gleamed in the officer's blood-shot eyes. He could command death with the touch of his finger.

"I should, Sergeant, give you time to say your prayers, but—"

Desperately, Bennet lunged forward. The automatic barked, spurted flame almost full in his face. Something hot—like the glowing tip

of a cigarette—touched the lobe of his left ear. His left hand caught the nose of the automatic. Swung it away as it belched flame for the third time.

And in that split second, Bennet caught a glimpse of a moving long shadow on the sand. He jerked up his head. Saratof stood three feet away. His both hands were gripping the barrel of his rifle. He had it raised over his head, about to crash the heavy butt on Colbert's skull.

"No!" Bennet yelled hoarsely. "I'll handle this, Saratof."

The Russian shrugged, lowered the rifle.

"Very well, Sergeant!"

Bennet bore the weight of his body on Colbert's shoulder, pinning him down. Then the muscles of his left forearm tensed, veins standing out like cords. Slowly, he began twisting Colbert's right wrist. Another inch, another, still another. The nose of the automatic swung around.

Now Bennet heard the sounds of running feet. Loud cries in shrill Arabic. The staccato sound of Larson's automatic rifle swinging into action. He did not even look up. In another second he knew Colbert would be forced to drop the automatic. Then Bennet meant to give him a savage, cold-blooded beating. The hungry hot sand had soaked the blood of sixty men—Bennet could still see the red horror of that massacre.

COLBERT, reading Bennet's intention in his eyes, began to scream incoherently, his eyes rolling until the whites showed, saliva trickling down the side of his loose mouth. He threw his body upward and to the left. He almost succeeded in tearing free his gun wrist, but the violence of the sudden jerk discharged the big blue automatic.

Bennet barely heard the shot. It

was lost in the bedlam of sound surrounding him, of which only now he became conscious. Colbert's body jerked convulsively upward from the sand, then relaxed.

Bennet stared at the little black hole, burned around the edges, in the officer's blue tunic.

AND then a heavy body crashed on top of him. Bennet swung out blindly. He checked his blow. The burly Arab, lying half-way across him, had the top of his head shot away. His burnoose was no longer white.

Bennet struggled up to a sitting position. The Arab was sprawled across his thighs, a dead, limp weight. Bennet tried to push him away—and then jerked his own body to the right, fingers clawing desperately on the sand for the automatic he had dropped. For another Arab towered over him, an immense scimitar in his right hand raised high over his head, the sun setting aflame its polished blue surface.

"I won't make it!" flashed through Bennet's mind.

And the Arab, seeming to read his thoughts, grinned through his black beard. The curved blade jerked upward still higher. Bennet, helpless, pinned down by the other Arab's burly body, anticipated the downward swoop of the heavy sword. He ceased clawing for the automatic, returned the Arab's grin.

And then the sun glittered on another blade of steel—a thin, long blade which flashed through the air like a living thing. It buried itself in the Arab's throat. Bennet twisted out of the way as the scimitar thudded on the sand, and again as the Arab toppled forward.

Legionnaire Fernandez pounced upon the dead man like a hungry dog upon a meat bone. He jerked out his ten-inch stiletto. The long, thin

blade now no longer reflected sunlight.

Only then Bennet dared to look down for the automatic. He saw it half-buried in the sand, three inches from Colbert's right hand. He squirmed out from beneath the Arab across his thighs, picked up the gun. He and the tall Arab who had suddenly loomed over him fired almost simultaneously. The Arab missed—at ten feet. He spun around as the slug from Bennet's automatic smashed his shoulder.

Bennet's second shot was wasted, though the bullet had found the Arab's heart. Fernandez had leaped forward a split second earlier. Again his stiletto sank hungrily into yielding flesh. Into the throat, just beneath the left ear. So had died the other Arab, and so have died the shopkeeper in Barcelona, the fat Frenchman in Marseilles and the policeman in Palermo.

AND then, as now, Fernandez had had a film over his eyes, and his fingers twitched crazily. Bennet, watching the Spaniard, felt a chill go down his spine.

"Allah Akbur!"

The madness of victory rang now in the shrill Moslem battle cry. A wolf pack leaping in with slashing white fangs to complete the kill!

Bennet looked to the left, from where the shouting came, and leaped to his feet. Only now he became fully aware of what was taking place.

And the trained officer in him responded instantly.

It was a case of quick thinking or—extermination! For already the narrow canyon was choked with Arab tribesmen. And more were coming from the bottle-neck further up. Fierce, black-bearded devils, brandishing their long rifles, their curved knives as they ran. Razor-edged

knives, one stroke from which could disembowel a man.

CHAPTER V

Fight and Run

THE men, tramping heavily on the powdery sand, sent up a thick cloud of dust; it took Bennet a dozen seconds, straining his eyes, before he could make out precisely what was happening.

At his left came an incessant, mad chatter of the automatic rifle. A rock there, and Bennet could just make out Larson's *kepi* and left shoulder. The Swede was crouching behind the rock, firing the rifle as quickly as he could press the trigger and feed fresh clips of cartridges.

Blitzky was flat on his stomach to the right of Larson. He worked the bolt and trigger of his rifle with an unhurried deliberation characteristic of the man. His rifle cracked with almost clock-like regularity. Precisely as if he were on target practice. But each time he pressed the trigger, death enfolded another mortal to his bony chest.

Fernandez prowled about with his stiletto—a madman on a blood rampage. And to Bennet's right, their backs against the wall, fighting with savage abandon, were Hauser, Saratof and Henderson. At least a score of Arabs hemmed them in a vicious semi-circle, charging constantly with long knives, their rifles useless at such close quarters.

Each time they were beaten back. Beaten back by Hauser, who, in the thick cloud of dust, seemed colossal—a giant from some other planet. The German used his rifle as a club, swinging it by the barrel over his head, and death reaped a harvest each time the heavy butt whistled through the air.

Beaten back by Saratof, who held

a bloody Arab knife in one hand and the broken remains of a rifle in the other; and who shook his shaggy head like a great Russian bear at each inflow of the attacking Arabs and leaped forward to meet it, gorilla-like arms flailing.

Beaten back by little Henderson, who had a bayonet at the end of his rifle. A fixed smile on his crooked mouth, the Cockney was a melody of grace as he leaped in and out with the deadly bayonet. He looked like a dancing master—or a fox-terrier nipping at the hind quarters of a grizzly.

No wasted motion. A thrust with the bayonet, a leap out of the way of a slashing knife, again a deadly lunge with the bayonet.

But no man could buck for long the odds of twenty to one and live. Saratof went down suddenly. Hauser leaped forward, the rifle whirling over his head. Standing astride of the Russian's body, he drove back the dozen men who were ready to sink their knives into the dog infidel's body.

AND Bennet found himself yelling, although Hauser could not possibly have heard him.

"Carry on for another minute. Just one minute longer!"

Blitzky, at the sound of Bennet's running footsteps, rolled on his side, swinging the rifle around.

"Get up!" Bennet panted. "You too, Larson. Now follow me!"

An Arab slashed at Bennet with a scimitar—a tremendous blow which would have beheaded the American had it reached its mark. Bennet ducked. The huge blade passed over his head. He straightened and jerked forward the automatic. The firing pin clicked on an empty cartridge.

Bennet threw the gun away with a curse, escaped by a fraction of an inch another slash from the scimitar.

His right fist clenched, he leaped in beneath the knife to meet the Arab.

Putting his full weight behind the blow, Bennet drove his fist to the Arab's chin. The burnoosed figure collapsed. Another Arab, about to bury a knife in Bennet's back, checked himself with an exclamation of amazement. It was a form of fighting the desert bandit had never seen before. And his mouth still open, he died a split second later as Blitzky tossed up his rifle, firing from the hip.

"Around this way!" Bennet shouted.

HE led the two Legionnaires to a natural series of steps up the wall of the canyon.

"I'm joining the others. You two get above us—and let them have it. Quick now!"

He bent down, swooped up a rifle, clubbed it. Then, his lower jaw bulging out grimly, he charged the Arab semi-circle around Hauser and Henderson. He came in the nick of time, too. For great beads of sweat stood out now on the German's forehead—and a terribly strained look was in his eyes. Henderson's face was gray beneath its tan.

Like a catapult, Bennet's one hundred and eighty pounds of bone and muscle struck the Arabs. Head down, his body hunched forward like that of a football back carrying the ball through the enemy's line, he cut through to the clearing in the center which Hauser had succeeded in keeping open with the bloody butt of the rifle. The German grinned his welcome.

Bennet smashed out madly with his rifle, beating down the knives, cracking skulls with the iron-shod butt.

He saw he had gained his object. Merely joining Hauser and Henderson would not have helped much. Would have only prolonged

the agony. Simply another man against scores.

But Bennet banked on the confusion that his sudden attack from the rear would cause among the Arabs. For a dozen seconds or so, they had no ways of knowing whether one man had attacked them or a fresh company of the Legion. Bennet wanted those dozen seconds of breathing space.

And he got it. The Arabs milled about like startled cattle. And then a hail of lead came from above. Larson's automatic rifle pouring death into the compact mass of the Arabs. Blitzky's rifle, emptied almost with the rapidity of a machine-gun. And both men now in position to fire at the line of Arabs immediately facing the men at the wall.

The first line melted like wax figures before an acetylene torch. Then those behind it. Shouts of terror now intermingled with the screams of the wounded and dying. Nothing could withstand that deadly spray of lead.

Like scurrying rats, the Arabs ran for cover.

BENNET stooped for a moment over Saratof. There was an ugly gash on the left side of the Russian's forehead. Blood still trickled from it. But, unless his skull were fractured, it was not a serious wound; he had been struck more with the flat side of the sword than the sharp edge.

"Help me get him on my shoulder." Bennet snapped to Hauser.

"I can carry him, Sergeant!"

"You heard what I said!"

Saratof sprawling over his right shoulder, with long arms and legs dangling, Bennet half ran to the natural steps which provided an easy ascent out of the canyon. Veins stood out on his forehead, and he breathed with a whistling sound;

Saratof weighed over two hundred pounds.

He suddenly saw Fernandez, running at his side, the bloody stiletto still clutched in his fist. There was a deep gash across the Spaniard's cheek, and he bled like a stuck pig.

"All right, Sergeant, hand him up to me!"

Hauser's voice. He had reached the top of the embankment ahead of Bennet, and was now reaching down for Saratof. Bennet passed the Russian up to him, scrambled up himself. Henderson followed, with the agility of a monkey.

"Get down, you fool!" Bennet shouted. "How the hell *could* anybody miss you?"

Hauser, after lowering Saratof, had straightened and was wiping the sweat off his face—while hundreds of bullets whined by like angry hornets. The German obeyed, grinning.

"I'M lucky, Sergeant, when it comes to bullets. That's for being so big. The bullets—they are ashamed—"

"Never mind that!" Bennet cut in curtly. "Let's have your canteen. And you, Fernandez—bandage your cheek. You'll bleed to death in a couple of minutes."

The Spaniard touched his cheek, then looked with blank amazement at the blood on his hand. He hadn't known he was wounded. Bennet began to unscrew the cap on Hauser's canteen, when Saratof opened his eyes.

With a grunt, Bennet tossed the canteen back to Hauser.

"How do you feel?" he snapped to the Russian.

Saratof sat up. He shook stubbornly his shaggy head.

"Well enough. Just a scratch, eh?"

Bennet nodded. "Now listen to me, men," he said quietly. "We're safe here for maybe two minutes: then they'll be all over us. It's fight

and run from now on. Our chances of getting back to the outpost are probably about one in a thousand, but we may as well gamble it.

"I needn't point out to you, of course, that a bullet from your own gun is a damn sight more preferable—more *pleasant*—than to be taken prisoner by those devils. And now—*let's go!*"

CHAPTER VI

Thirty Minutes' Start

BENNET led at a pace which would be a madness and an impossibility long to maintain. Up an apparently unscalable wall, over a flat plateau, down a deep gulch—his tall, lithe body moving with the sure-footedness of a mountain goat.

He hadn't allowed himself to think as he crossed on the run ledges which should have been crawled over. Ledges, fifty, sixty feet above spear-like rocks.

Only one of the men had voiced an objection—Saratof, who had fully recovered from his wound and was sticking close behind Bennet.

"Men," the Russian panted, "are adaptive animals, my friend. But tight-rope walking takes practice, and one can't instantly transform oneself into a cat. Simple laws of averages will tell you one can't take long the chances you are taking—and live."

Bennet grimly jerked his thumb over his shoulder.

"Listen! And now figure out your chances if they should catch up with us."

Saratof shrugged and made no more complaints. For plainly, with a sinister clarity, they could hear the cry of the wolf pack behind them—the Arabs pursuing their escaping prey. Shrill shouts, in which the

blood cry was predominant, foolish emptying of rifles. The pack on the trail!

And slowly but surely the Arabs were drawing closer. Look-outs, who had climbed the peaks of the highest cliffs from where they could get occasional glimpses of the fugitives, were directing the pursuit through a code of signal shots. The Arabs had the advantage of being strung out in a long line—which meant that Bennet lost distance each time he was forced to veer to the right or to the left.

A FLAT white rock caught his eyes. It was at the top of a gentle yet comparatively long incline, and afforded a natural breast-work of a sort. When they reached it, Bennet scurried around it and dropped, panting, on the sand. In a few seconds, all of the others joined him.

No one spoke for a few minutes. All were passionately grateful for the respite to their tortured lungs, to aching, sweating, hot bodies. Hauser lifted himself up on one elbow. He swore under his breath, then said aloud:

"*Mein Gott*, Sergeant, but they're getting close! We fight it out here?"

Bennet smiled crookedly.

"No. But we'll slow them up. The boys are too impetuous. We want to teach them to treat with more respect each innocent-looking rock, each descent into a possible place for ambush. How many cartridges have you left, Larson?"

The Swede shook his head.

"Not many, Sergeant. Two rounds."

"Besides the one in the rifle now?"

"Including that one."

Bennet frowned. The automatic rifle fired thirty shots. Altogether, then, Larson, had sixty cartridges at his disposal. Exhausting those, he could throw away the clumsy-looking

yet deadly efficient rifle; it would no longer be of any use.

"You told me," the Swede added apologetically, "to let them have it. So—"

"All right," Bennet interrupted. "I'm not accusing you. Where's your rifle, Fernandez?"

The Spaniard rolled his eyes.

"I threw it away. I don't like it. I prefer—" He caressed the blood-stained blade of his stiletto, and again Bennet felt a chill go down his spine.

"Give your cartridges to Blitzky. How many clips have you?"

"Fifteen."

"Good! Give them to Blitzky. If Blitzky is hit," Bennet added quietly, "you take his rifle, Saratof, and the cartridges. And you, Hauser, are next in line."

The Russian and the German nodded, their faces expressionless.

"Just one other suggestion," Saratof said. "Make sure your comrade is dead before you leave him. A bullet through the heart would not harm any. I do not care to wriggle on the stake."

Hauser bowed his head pompously.

"I SHALL do you that little favor, friend, if you promise me the same."

"It's a promise," said Saratof.

They shook hands gravely.

"They're here, blast 'em!" Henderson snarled, unslinging his rifle. The Cockney rested the rifle on top of the rock and placed his cheek against the butt. Bennet gripped his ankle. He pulled the Cockney off the rock. Henderson whirled with a snarl, fists clenched. Bennet looked at him quietly.

"I give orders around here, Henderson."

The Cockney lowered his arms.

"Yes, Guv'nor," he muttered.

"We haven't any ammunition to

waste. When I give command, Larson and Blitzky will open fire. Larson will empty his rifle, and cease firing. Blitzky will continue. You, Henderson, will stick close to him, your job merely reloading. Hand him your rifle when he empties his, and so on.

"Remove the bayonet from your rifle. If they should get close enough for you to use it, you'll die anyway. And all of you stay down out of sight until I give further orders."

HE looked around quietly, waited a moment, then began crawling on his belly around the rock. He looked down the long, white incline, at the smooth sand pitted with their own footprints. The Arabs were in the next gulch, so close that Bennet could make out their voices as they called to one another. A matter of seconds now before they would be running up the incline. Bennet waited.

The sun, still high in the sky, burnt the back of his neck; he felt as if he were covered by a compress of a towel dipped in boiling hot water. His tongue was dry, his throat and nostrils choked with the fine dust. His water canteen was full; but the Legionnaire's first desert lesson is to distinguish and ignore the mere "mouth" thirst.

In thirty minutes or so, Bennet and the others would permit themselves one long drink—and another, two hours later. But none until then, and none in between. Conservation of water—the one stern law of the desert; and death struck quickly him who ignored it.

A cloud of dust rose abruptly at the foot of the incline. It came from the gulch which terminated it. And then the first of the Arabs scrambled over the top. He glanced at the footprints plain in the sand,

brandished his long rifle. He shouted something in rapid Arabic.

More men came out of the gulch. Dozens, scores. Bennet hadn't dreamt there were so many of them—and his heart sank at the thought of the odds his men were facing. A hundred to one, probably. Hopeless odds—even for the Devil's Squad. Sooner or later—He stifled the thought.

Swiftly, he crawled back around the rock.

"Larson! Get up there, quick! And you, Blitzky. Careful, though. Don't show any more of yourselves than absolutely necessary. And hold your fire until I give orders."

THE two men on either side of him, Bennet crawled up the sloping side of the ten-foot rock. Cautiously, he looked over the top. The Arabs were now fifty yards away, and coming quickly. Their very number reminded Bennet of a tidal wave—irresistible, impossible to check.

"Not," he whispered out of the corner of his mouth, "until I give command to fire."

"Yes, Sergeant," said Larson.

The big, raw-boned, leather-faced Swede had been kicked out of the armies of three nations, and had wound up in the Legion simply because soldiering was in his blood as the sea had been in the blood of his Viking ancestors. His eyes were flaming as he looked down through the sights of his automatic rifle.

Blitzky's face, hugging the butt of his rifle, was as expressionless as that of a Chinese idol. He was an Armenian with a pale oval face, the delicate ivory coloring of which even the desert sun could not affect, and extraordinarily beautiful soft black eyes.

A quiet little man, yet there was a Croix de Guerre pinned to his

tunic, and he had a reputation for cold-blooded courage among men with whom courage was common virtue. His skill with the rifle was uncanny.

CLOSER, closer swept the tidal wave. Forty yards, thirty, twenty. Larson began to squirm on the rock. And still Bennet waited.

Then—"Fire! From left to right!"

He had shouted the command when the Arabs suddenly discovered the three heads over the top of the rock, the two barrels of the rifles. And then invisible death ran amuck among the first line of the enemy, like a mad grizzly let loose in a sheep pen.

Larson's automatic rifle ripped great holes in the line, and Blitzky's rifle, fired with a rapidity Bennet hadn't dreamt was possible, rang the death knell of some son of Allah each time it spurted flame.

But did not the Prophet promise paradise, the land of milk and honey where soft-eyed houris lived, to the true believer who fell in battle?

"*Illah Akbur!*"

They kept coming, the living leaping over the twisting, screaming bodies of the wounded and dying. No stopping them now. In a moment, they would overrun the rock. And then death would be mercifully swift.

Bennet jerked around.

"Grenades," he shouted to Henderson, working feverishly reloading the rifles Blitzky emptied. "Toss one up to me. Quick, damn you!"

Bennet had the firing pin out of the bomb almost as soon as he caught it. An Arab had just died three feet away from the rock. And dozens of others were almost as close. Close together. The bomb, to which Bennet had held on before throwing it until sweat stood out on his forehead and his heart hammered madly,

exploded in the midst of them. Yelling men one moment; bloody shambles when the column of sand settled.

Bennet felt another bomb being pressed into his hand. He took it, jerked out the pin, threw the grenade—and more bloody shambles caked the fine sand.

Henderson's shrill voice, "Only one left, Sergeant."

Bennet reached out for it, but it wasn't needed. The devil rocks of the dog unbelievers had been too much for the Arabs. Allah could make well the bullet wounds, so that the true believer might enjoy the houris in the land of milk and honey; but how could even Allah put together him who was only a bloody patch on the sand?

They retreated, running madly down the incline. And continually Blitzky worked the bolts and triggers of the two hot rifles, sending death nipping at the flanks of the fleeing Arabs.

"All right," Bennet said quietly, "cease firing!"

HE looked down the incline. The losses suffered by the Arabs were terrific. At least a hundred men lay dead and dying on the seventy-five-yard stretch of sandy slope. Many were groaning; some screamed. And high overhead, the vultures gathered. Later, they would descend lower and lower, to land finally and wait, cruel beak and claws ready, for the death rattle of the last man to die—

Bennet turned and slid off the rock. He motioned the other two men to join him. Henderson, catching the tall sergeant's eyes, said triumphantly:

"We showed them bloody heathens what's what, eh?"

Bennet checked him with an impatient gesture.

"Well, men," he said quietly,

"we've accomplished our object, which was simply to slow up the pursuit. Otherwise, we have gained nothing.

"They've had a costly lesson; but if they have brains enough to profit by it, we're *through*."

"Meaning precisely what?" asked Saratof.

"They'll try to surround us now. Block us ahead, flank us—give us a taste of our own medicine. If they manage to get above on some of those cliffs, one volley and—" His voice trailed away significantly.

Silence for a moment.

"Well, what do you propose, Sergeant?"

Bennet stood up.

"We have one chance," he said evenly—"and one only. That's to get out of these damn rocks. Get back on the plain. Lose ourselves there, which is easy enough since foot-prints disappear in a few minutes on that ever shifting sand."

"And once we're out there—what?" Hauser asked gutturally.

"**Y**ES, Sergeant," Saratof added thoughtfully, "what then? We have enough water for perhaps four days. Surely they'll anticipate the fact that our only chance is to get back to the outpost. They'll follow the general route toward it, and, of course, are bound to overtake us. As I see it, it's only prolonging the agony."

"Yes," said Bennet, "as you see it. No offense meant," he added quickly, as the burly Russian flushed beneath his tan. "My plan is this. Instead of cutting directly across to the outpost, we'll make a great circle. A circle wide enough to fool them."

Saratof shook his head skeptically.

"I'll concede it's our only chance, my friend, but—"

"I know," Bennet said impatiently:

"it's a thousand to one gamble, but I'm taking it. You men with me?"

"To hell and back," Hauser grinned.

Bennet returned his grin with a crooked smile.

"I don't promise the return trip, but a taste of hell you *will* get. We've got to have at least a thirty-minute start on them—which means mighty fast traveling. Come on!"

CHAPTER VII

The Laugh Of A Madman

SPEED! Driving weary bodies to their saturation point of endurance, and then still further. Ignoring tortured lungs which seemed on the point of bursting. Ignoring the blinding sweat. Ignoring the shrieking complaints of every muscle in their bodies. A red horror of speed.

For close to an hour now, Bennet hadn't for a moment ceased running. He himself did not know how he managed it, nor did the others, who somehow succeeded in sticking close to him.

He'd conceived a grim game, which seemed to help. He would determine on some landmark—some oddly-shaped rock; and run toward it at full speed, grimly determined to make it. Make it if he dropped dead when he did!

And he always would make it, somehow, though every step he took seemed sure to be his last. Then, without giving himself a chance to think, he would instantly pick out another landmark. From what source he drew that bit of extra energy when it seemed inconceivable that he should manage to remain on his feet another minute, he did not know; and he marvelled at it.

As he ran, there was one thought ever present with him. They must gain a thirty-minute start on the

Arabs. They must—if they were to live. Enough time to be swallowed up by the vast space of the desert before the Arabs themselves reached the edge of the great plain of sand.

THEY must—and sometimes his swollen heat-cracked lips formed the words, although minutes must pass before he would be able to speak again.

With a stupid sort of amazement, Bennet suddenly recognized the low ridge up the slanted bank of which he was now struggling. It was the last before the plains began again. They'd made it! Three-four minutes longer, and they would leave the rocks. The smooth, hot bed of the desert awaited them—and a fighting chance for life.

His knees trembling, he finally made his way to the top. He paused, swaying on his feet, and waited for the others to join him. Something whined past his left ear. Bennet paid no attention to it.

And then he heard Henderson screaming—heard it as if the little Cockney were far, far away. Actually, Henderson was two feet away from him. He was pointing down the other side of the ridge which blended smoothly, three hundred yards further, with the level floor of the desert.

The paralyzing, brain-numbing weariness relaxed its strangle hold on Bennet. He could see now. Following the direction of Henderson's outstretched arm, he saw horsemen. Perhaps a dozen of them, strung out in a long line. Several of them were firing their long rifles, the graceful, nervous animals beneath them kicking up fine puffs of dust with their sharp little hooves.

Bennet dropped on the sand. Not as a precaution against the Arab bullets whining past him, for somehow they did not matter; but simply be-

cause he could afford now to give his body the rest it so desperately needed. No longer necessary to drive it. The horsemen below had eliminated their only chance of escape!

Sprawled on the hot sand, arms and legs outstretched, Bennet rested. It was a delightful luxury. He could hear the panting of the others, at his right and left, sucking air into their bursting lungs.

Gradually, he felt his heart cease its mad tattoo against his ribs. Strength seeped back into his limbs. He rolled over, lifted himself up on his elbows. He looked down the sloping bank of the ridge.

FOUR men were approaching them. All had white horses. The Arabs were lashing the magnificent animals to a mad gallop. Through the thick cloud of dust raised by the hooves of the horses, Bennet could see the sun glinting on the huge curved scimitars.

The four horsemen were still quite some distance away, but closing in with the speed of a tornado. Bennet stared at them apathetically. In two minutes, the Arabs would be upon them. Was it worth making a fuss over? A swift slash from those heavy scimitars—and all would be over. They'd be forever free from heat and dust and weariness.

"Blitzky!" he said quietly.

The Legionnaire looked up wearily. Bennet pointed at the approaching horsemen. No alarm in the gesture, nor was there any in the quiet way Blitzky had picked up his rifle. Bennet might have been pointing to an exciting moment in a polo match, and Blitzky might have been lifting his glasses for a better look.

Blitzky began firing, unhurriedly, impersonally. The Arab in the lead threw up his arms. Held them that way for a moment. He looked like a trick circus rider showing off be-

fore an admiring audience. He toppled off the back of the horse.

The horse of the Arab behind him shied. It reared itself up on its haunches, front hooves pawing the air. Crack! Blitzky's rifle spoke again. The Arab slid out of the saddle. His right foot caught in the stirrup, and the terrified animal dragged him in a huge circle over the hot floor of the desert.

Bennet felt as if he were in the front seat of a theatre, watching a melodrama. Not a particularly interesting melodrama, and one the precise ending of which he knew in advance. Yet it was good to look it, for it helped pass the time away. The others felt the same way. They watched passively, in dead silence.

FOR the third time, Blitzky fired. The only emotional response it aroused in Bennet was a vague curiosity as to which of the two remaining Arabs would fall. It was the one on the right. Bennet waited for the fourth and last shot, which would drop the curtain on the scene unfolding before him.

It was a melodrama with a surprise twist on the end. The remaining Arab only fifty yards away, Blitzky for the fourth time brought the rifle butt to his shoulder. There was faint boredom on his pale face. He touched the trigger. The hammer fell on a deficient cartridge. It was the last in the clip!

And then, like some mythical figure of vengeance, the Arab on his magnificent white charger was among them. A fierce, bearded black face; the huge scimitar, set aflame by the sun, sweeping downward like a thunderbolt.

So certain were the Legionnaires of the death shot from Blitzky's rifle—the man who never missed—that, for a split second, they were figures of stone. The front hooves

of the horse flashed for a moment over Bennet. Then the animal, specially trained for that, struck out. A vicious, lightning-like downward jab with the sharp hooves, which would have crushed Bennet's chest like an egg beneath a sledge hammer had they found their mark.

Somehow, Bennet evaded the hooves, though he wasn't sure how. He'd thrown himself backwards, twisting his body to the left. The hooves half-buried themselves in the sand two inches from his body.

THEY were withdrawn instantly. The Arab's left hand tugged viciously on the reins. The white charger sat back, hurling its front legs straight up in the air. Higher, higher, until it stood straight up on its hind legs.

And then Bennet saw the Arab's bearded face jerk around the neck of the horse. He was standing in his stirrups, about to slash out again with the curved sword. And now he would not miss, could not miss, with Bennet's body directly in the path of that sweeping arc.

A big body crossed between Bennet and the sun. Crossed in one tigerish leap. A huge hand caught the bridle of the horse. Hauser jerked up his both knees. Two hundred and eighty pounds hung for a split second onto the head of the animal. Trembling, its eyes rolling wildly, the big white charger stood still, its four legs now on the ground.

And Bennet wondered why the Arab did not strike out with the scimitar. Why he sat there, motionless, the curved sword still raised over his head. Then he heard Fernandez' soft laughter—the laugh of a madman—and he understood.

When the Arab suddenly toppled forward, Bennet saw the hilt of the stiletto sticking out like a huge wart on the tribesman's neck.

Bennet rose to his feet. With the back of his sleeve, he wiped the sweat out of his eyes.

"That," he drawled, "one might call a close shave."

"Are you quite sure," Saratof asked quietly, "that our friends Hauser and Fernandez have done you a favor, Sergeant?"

Bennet appraised the Russian thoughtfully. He nodded.

"I have a hunch I know what you're driving at, Saratof."

"If you look behind you," the Russian continued evenly, "your—er—hunch will be a certainty."

Bennet turned slowly. He shrugged.

"Yes," he said simply.

A white figure stood in bold relief on top of a parallel ridge, a quarter of a mile away. Stood there, motionless, watching them. And even as Bennet looked, other figures joined him. The first of the pursuing Arabs, finally in sight of their prey. Waiting there for the rest of the pack to catch up.

BENNET looked in the opposite direction. As so many ghosts, men and animals motionless against the background of gray sand, the Arab horsemen awaited them there. Trapped!

"You see, my friend, a stroke from that scimitar would have been sure and final. Effort in this heat is unpleasant, and another twenty minutes of life isn't quite worth it." Saratof laughed softly. "*Herr* Hauser and *Señor* Fernandez, you owe our American friend an apology."

"On the contrary," Bennet grinned, "I would have been denied the pleasure of dying in such excellent company. The Devil's Squad shall march to hell together, gentlemen."

"Well said, by Blimey!" Henderson shouted. "We'll march to hell together, and raise the devil with the devil!"

He threw back his head and laughed until tears came to his eyes. Larson dropped on his knees and calmly reloaded his automatic rifle. Saratof rolled himself a brown cigarette, lighted it, puffed on it quietly. Occasionally, he would glance indifferently at the parallel ridge which was now white with the advancing line of the Arabs.

Hauser unhooked his canteen.

"You know, Sergeant," he said, "here's something I've wanted to do ever since I joined the Legion: to empty my canteen on a desert patrol. Take ten drinks, twenty drinks. Fill my belly with water until it feels like a hog's head, then throw the canteen away. And, *Gotteswillen*, I'm going to do it!"

He raised the canteen to his lips. Bennet stared at him—stared at him with such fixed intensity that the German, catching his eyes, lowered the canteen with a grunt.

"What's wrong, Sergeant?"

An idea had flashed to Bennet. He seized upon it, turned it over in his mind. The idea expanded, took root, flourished. He whirled to Saratof.

"We still have a chance," he said tensely—"if my reasoning is sound. The water hole is two hundred yards up this ridge, isn't it?"

"True, but—"

"Come on!" Bennet shouted exultantly. "We might lick them yet. Anyway, it's a fighting chance for life."

"My friend, are you—"

Bennet laughed. "No, I haven't gone mad! Follow me, men!"

CHAPTER VIII

Water Is Life

BENNET led them on the run along the length of the short ridge. He slid down, in a cloud of choking dust, to a natural

rocky basin of a sort, fringed on all sides by steep granite walls. In the center of the bowl-like clearing was a pool of what at first seemed like slimy mud. But many a desert traveler who had run out of water had found life on the edge of that pool.

Bennet gripped Saratof's sleeve, swung the Russian around.

"See?" he said triumphantly. "No tracks. They haven't been here yet."

The Russian stared at him.

"Who?"

"Those devils after us. Damn it, man, don't you understand?"

"I don't," Saratof replied bluntly.

Bennet shrugged. He turned to Henderson.

"Got a grenade left? No, I am not crazy! Come on, let's have it!"

Without a word, the Cockney handed Bennet a grenade.

"All right," Bennet said tersely, "stand back, everybody! I'm going to try to blow up this water hole—and you men better pray I do the trick."

"One grenade won't do it," Saratof drawled.

"Maybe not," Bennet agreed quietly—"in which case we die, gentlemen. Stand back, Fernandez!"

WITH slow deliberation, he drew out the firing pin. He counted aloud, "One, two, three—" The bomb left his hand. And then a geyser of mud leaped twenty feet into the air.

When it dissolved, the pool was no more. Simply a black pit. The grenade had torn a hole in the granite cup into which the tiny subterranean spring had emptied. The dry powdery sand beneath it soaked up hungrily every bit of the moisture.

"Well, Sergeant," Saratof murmured, "you did it. But why? Water-holes are scarce enough in this God-forsaken country."

"Which is one of the reasons I did it," Bennet drawled. "I'll explain

later. We've got to get up on that cliff now—and get up there in a hurry. Come on!"

It was a tortuous climb, up an almost perpendicular wall. They ascended a few inches at a time, taking advantage of every niche, every crevice in the rocky wall. Long before he had reached the top, Bennet's hands were slippery with the blood trickling from beneath his torn finger-nails.

And a dozen feet from the top, Arab bullets began to splatter viciously against the wall, ricocheting off with metallic whines. But the Arabs were still too far away for accurate shooting.

BENNET swung himself over the top of the cliff. On his feet now, he turned and helped Fernandez up. The Spaniard's face was so gray and drawn that, for a moment, Bennet thought he'd been hit by one of the bullets. Fernandez snarled a curse when Bennet asked him. He shook his head and dropped flat on his face. The loss of blood he had suffered from the wound in his cheek hadn't helped him in the nerve-racking climb.

One by one, the others joined Bennet.

"What now, Sergeant?" panted Hauser, who was the last to reach the top of the cliff.

"Nothing."

"What!"

"Exactly what I said," Bennet repeated. "We sit back and take it easy. Only one way to get up on this cliff—the way we came. A cat couldn't climb the other three walls. Here we can defy an army."

"True," said Saratof, "but for how long? Our supply of water will run out in a few days. That sun is hot. In a week, we'll be screaming maniacs. All they have to do is to sit back on their haunches and wait. Per-

sonally, I'd much prefer to go down fighting, as we might have, there below. It's quicker—and cleaner. Why prolong the agony?"

"That's what I say," Henderson cried fiercely. "I tore my guts out on that bloody climb—and for what? To fry in the sun and die of thirst on a bloomin' rock?"

The others made no comment, but Bennet read the accusations in their eyes.

"Saratof," he asked quietly, "where is the next waterhole from here?"

"Tel-av-Ris—thirty kilometers from here."

"Could Abdul el Ras and his wolves replenish their water supply there?"

THE Russian stared at him. "Are you joking, my friend? Of course not. That waterhole is in the shadow of the fort."

"Exactly," said Bennet. "Where, then, is the next nearest waterhole?"

Saratof rubbed thoughtfully his big chin.

"There is greatness in you, my friend. I am beginning to see light. The next nearest waterhole from here is ninety kilometers."

"It is natural to assume, is it not, that the Arabs have *not* been too sparing with their water, knowing that there was a waterhole below here?"

"Yes."

"And when they find the waterhole is no more—"

Saratof sighed. "Sometimes I am guilty of much stupidity."

"They find," Bennet continued quietly, "that they cannot replenish their water supply here—upon which contingency they certainly did not count. Abdul el Ras is an intelligent devil. Ninety kilometers is a considerable distance to travel. Every hour they linger here is dangerous, for water is life on the desert. And Abdul el Ras will certainly consider

the rather important fact that a strong searching party will undoubtedly be sent out from the outpost, when our company fails to show up within the next twenty-four hours.

"Place yourself in the Arabs position, Saratof; what would *you* do?"

"Sergeant Bennet," the Russian said gravely, "I bow before superior intelligence."

Bennet grinned. "It may be only an interesting theory—and the Arabs may have a card up their sleeve that I have overlooked. But it *does* give us a fighting chance."

He crawled to the edge of the cliff, looked over. The advancing line of the Arabs was now hidden behind the ridge. Only a question of several minutes before they swept over. Bennet waited.

HE grinned again when he saw the first of the white-clad figures. The Arabs had profited by the costly lesson given them two hours earlier. The first dozen men crawled over the ridge on their bellies, sliding their rifles before them.

"Open fire, Sergeant?" Blitzky asked casually, crawling to Bennet's side.

"Not yet."

The Arabs advanced warily, obviously amazed at, and suspicious of, the unnatural quiet. Many were staring up at the top of the cliff, shading their eyes from the sun.

"All right, Blitzky," Bennet said calmly—"three shots. We may as well inform them that we're up here to stay, and *don't* want visitors."

Blitzky nodded, thrust the barrel of his rifle over the edge. He looked down through the sights, then gently touched the trigger. The shrill screaming curse of a man mortally wounded followed the echo of the shot.

Blitzky fired again. Another Arab writhed convulsively on the sand. At

the third shot, the Arabs retreated. It was madness to advance in the face of such deadly marksmanship, and the sun glaring in their eyes prohibited any effective return fire.

Blitzky yawned. He looked up at Bennet for further orders.

"We'll take two-hour sentry shifts, men," Bennet said, raising his voice so that all might hear him. "You take the first shift, Blitzky, for the damn fools might try to rush us. I'll relieve you. You follow me, Saratof."

"Hauser will relieve you, and Henderson and Fernandez are next in line. At the first sign of trouble, I am to be awakened—and I want that understood clearly. Do nothing on your own initiative."

He looked at Blitzky. The Legionnaire nodded.

"I understand, Sergeant."

BENNET stretched himself out at full length on the hot rock. His body, grateful for the desperately needed relaxation, scarcely noticed the furnace-like heat. He was asleep almost instantly.

And only several minutes later, it seemed to him, he was being awakened. Blitzky was leaning over him.

"Two hours, Sergeant, as close as I was able to judge."

Bennet sighed. "Very well. Give me your rifle."

He crawled to the edge. The others were asleep, Hauser and Saratof snoring with a curious synchronization. Bennet grinned at the two men; then his body grew taut.

He had heard a foreign sound from below somewhere. He crawled closer to the edge, looked down.

The black pit which marked the place where the waterhole had been was fifty feet below him. An Arab had detached himself from the shadow of the wall and was crossing quickly to the pit. He was carrying

a huge skin gourd which might hold as many as ten gallons of water. At the edge of the pit, he stiffened and stood perfectly still. Bennet smiled grimly when he thought what must be passing through the tribesman's mind.

"Probably doesn't believe his eyes," he said to himself. "That waterhole has been there for Lord knows how many generations."

BENNET touched the trigger of the rifle. He deliberately fired wide, for he wanted the Arab to deliver the message. Like a startled deer, the man leaped away from the edge of the pit, dropping the gourd in his haste. He disappeared for a moment around the cliff, then Bennet saw him running wildly up the incline leading up to the ridge.

Out of the corner of his eyes, Bennet noticed Henderson, down on one knee, a rifle butt at his shoulder. Saratof, leaping in, threw up the barrel of the rifle as the Cockney squeezed the trigger.

"Fool!" he said fiercely.

"Quick thinking, Saratof," Bennet added quietly. "Although it was nothing that I might not have expected from you."

The Russian extended his hand. "My gratitude for a very fine compliment, my friend."

Bennet accepted his hand, gripped it.

"The past ever creeps up," he said simply. "We understand each other."

Henderson opened his mouth beligerently, changed his mind, and wiped his nose with the back of his hand. Bennet watched the running Arab disappear over the ridge. Silence for a moment. Then fierce shouting pierced the desert stillness. It grew louder, gathering volume, as more and more men joined in.

"He is spreading the good news," Saratof drawled sarcastically.

They waited in silence for a few minutes, rolling brown cigarettes, dragging the blue smoke deep into their lungs. An ominous quiet had for several minutes now displaced the shouting. It worried Bennet. The Arabs were up to something.

A yell from Fernandez brought Bennet running to the other edge of the bluff. He dropped on his stomach as a terrific volley rocked the still air. But it was only a final spiteful gesture from the retreating Arabs, now strung out in a long white line across the great plain of sand.

"Their supply of water was even less than I imagined," Bennet said slowly. "Gentlemen, we live!"

CHAPTER IX

Under Arrest

A GAIN the Devil's Squad marched across the hot sand, but the demon of speed did not lash its whip now over the six men. Death no longer yapped at their heels. Fifty minutes of steady marching, then ten minutes of rest. So hour after hour.

The blazing sun sank lower and lower, disappearing finally over the mountains of Morocco. A great yellow moon now bathed the great plain of sand. The sky was alive with stars—blue-black velvet sprinkled with diamonds. In the south blazed the gorgeous Southern Cross. And still the Devil's Squad marched.

And then, abruptly, the walls of the outpost loomed before them. One of the scores which the French have stationed throughout West Morocco and Algiers, and for eight hundred miles south from El Harib to the sluggish waters of the Niger. The stark, harsh outlines of the stone fort clashed with the serene beauty of the night. Moonlight failed to

soften them. The iron, mailed fist of France upon the desert; an arrogant symbol of possession.

A six-foot wall, looped at two-foot intervals for the defending rifles, squared the roof of the outpost. Silent yet grimly eloquent, the black snouts of swivel-mounted machine-guns at each of the four corners looked out into the night—a stern warning to the sons of Allah who might covet the strong post of the dog unbelievers.

"Well," Bennet sighed, "we're here, men!"

A sharp voice rang out from the rectangular roof: "Who goes there?"

The sentry's face, his rifle thrust out ahead of him, was framed in one of the loopholes.

Bennet raised his voice. He said bitterly, "Company C returning from patrol duty. Sergeant Bennet speaking."

He smiled crookedly at the incredulity on the sentry's face. The man withdrew his head. Thirty seconds later, the great doors below swung open.

"But, Sergeant," the sentry asked curiously, staring at Bennet, "where is the company?"

"**Y**OU see all of it now," Bennet

I replied shortly. "Take me before Captain Renoult. Have him awakened, if necessary."

"It shall not be necessary, Sergeant," said a quiet voice. Lieutenant Ravel, fully dressed, came down the stone steps. "Captain Renoult will see you immediately. Follow me!"

"Yes, *mon* Lieutenant."

Captain Renoult, his powerful, massive body clad in silk pajamas, awaited them behind his huge desk. Bennet jerked his body to attention, saluted. He repeated, parrot-like:

"Company C reporting from patrol duty."

For the first time in the years he'd

known him, Bennet saw some semblance of emotion on Captain Renoult's beefy face. Slowly, he appraised the six men, then his fingers began to drum on the top of the desk.

Sixty men had marched out of the outpost; six scarecrows in torn uniforms, covered from head to foot with dust and dried blood, returned.

"The others?" Captain Renoult asked quietly.

"Dead, *mon Capitan*. Because, if I am permitted to say so, of the criminal negligence of Lieutenant Colbert. I had warned the lieutenant. He refused to listen to me. He did not hold the column ten minutes as he said he would, when I and the Legionnaires present here had gone ahead to investigate a possible and probable ambush." Bennet shrugged. "So—fifty lives were lost, *mon Capitan*."

"Including that of Lieutenant Colbert?"

BENNET looked the captain straight in the eyes.

"Yes," he said evenly.

Captain Renoult continued to drum his fingers on the table. Bennet suddenly became conscious of a certain tenseness in the air.

He said nothing, standing stiffly at attention.

Renoult spoke abruptly, looking up.

"That was not a fair question I had asked you before, and I am sorry. Sometimes, I realize, there is justification for any action. I have had my eyes on you for some time now, Sergeant Bennet. You're a fine soldier, and you're a gentleman. The War Department has now my recommendation for the Government of France to commission you.

"In view of that, I regret what has happened fully as much as the criminally stupid loss of those fifty lives."

"I don't quite understand, *mon Capitan*," Bennet said slowly.

"You shall in a moment," said Captain Renoult. He motioned to the youthful lieutenant. "Have him come in here."

Bennet caught the edge of the desk for support. For strolling nonchalantly through the door came Lieutenant Colbert, a half-smile on his loose mouth. He shut the door behind him, turned to Bennet.

"Surprised, Sergeant?" he sneered. "You should have made sure I was dead. As it is, you rather bungled the job. Not that it was your fault; you tried hard enough to kill me. But I happen to carry a silver cigarette case in the inside pocket of my tunic, which quite nicely deflected the bullet. Too bad, eh, Sergeant?"

BENNET straightened, now in full command of himself. But Captain Renoult's cold, emotionless voice cut in before he had a chance to answer.

"Sergeant Bennet, right now I am forced to place you under arrest. You are charged with a murderous assault upon an officer. At present you need say nothing in your defense. You shall be granted full opportunity tomorrow when I shall hold a formal court-martial."

Bennet nodded. "Yes, *mon Capitan*."

"I want you to bear three things in mind, Sergeant," Captain Renoult continued, looking steadily up at Bennet. "First, that I am fully aware of the circumstances involved. Second, that Lieutenant Colbert shall face you—unofficially, at least—as a private citizen, for I have in my desk now his written resignation from the French Foreign Legion.

"Third, that if a defendant pleads innocent of the crime with which he is charged, evidence must be presented by the accuser before a con-

viction is possible. Have I made myself perfectly clear, Sergeant?"

Colbert stepped forward, his face flushed.

"That's not quite fair, Captain Renoult," he said angrily.

Renoult looked at him coldly. "And why not, Lieutenant?"

COLBERT hesitated. "Very well, Captain; I have spoken hastily. However, I shall waive my charges against Sergeant Bennet if he looks in my eyes right now and denies the fact that he is guilty of attempting to murder me. This is certainly fair, is it not? Perhaps," he added with a sneer, "I am laboring under a hallucination, brought about by the sun out in the desert there."

Captain Renoult silenced Bennet with a curt gesture as he was about to speak.

"You will keep quiet, Sergeant, and say nothing unless you are spoken to."

He turned to Colbert. "I see, Lieutenant, that you too recognize a gentleman when you see one. I fear that you will successfully capitalize upon that knowledge. It is too bad. Nevertheless, the incident is closed for tonight.

"We shall reopen it when we hold the court-martial tomorrow afternoon, when you may formally make your accusation. That's all! Lieutenant Ravel, you shall see personally that Sergeant Bennet is placed under lock and key."

The blond young lieutenant murmured, "Yes, Captain."

He motioned to Bennet, and the two of them walked out of the office. In silence they proceeded down the long corridor. Several times Bennet caught the young lieutenant glancing at him out of the corner of his eyes. As Bennet entered the small, hot cell Ravel spoke impulsively, leaning forward.

"I do hope, Sergeant, you will not be a fool."

Bennet turned. He smiled at the youngster.

"What would you do if you were in my position, Lieutenant?" he asked quietly. "Would you give the thing of slime that Colbert is, the satisfaction he wants? All heroism and idealism aside, could you face Colbert at the court-martial tomorrow and watch him smile while you lied, to evade a long sentence to the Penal Battalions? Could you do that—and still keep your self-respect, Lieutenant?"

Lieutenant Ravel turned his head away.

"Isn't it a pity, Sergeant, that dueling has been prohibited?" he said slowly.

He walked away without waiting for an answer. The Legionnaire who had come with him slammed shut the metal door.

Bennet heard the receding footsteps. He felt his way in the darkness to the iron cot, sat on it and placed his head on his hands. He rocked quietly in the darkness. The silence in the stuffy little room was that of a tomb.

CHAPTER X

Payment for Blood

YET, strangely enough, Bennet found that it wasn't of himself that he was thinking as he sat there in the hot blackness of the cell. His mind re-enacted the scene in the canyon. Colbert's body leaping upward convulsively when the trigger of the automatic had been squeezed. If he weren't wounded, the officer at least had been stunned.

Then that surge of Arabs had swept over all of them. An officer's uniform is conspicuous. Would it have been ignored? Wouldn't the

Arabs have surely ascertained whether the commanding officer of the hated foreign devils were dead?

"And even if he was, they'd have hacked him to bits—just for the hell of it!" Bennet said to himself. "Something damn funny here."

COLBERT'S story, of course, was that the Arabs had left him for dead, giving him a chance to escape. But Bennet refused to accept it, somehow. It was neither probable nor logical. Colbert would have never got out of that canyon alive—unless they had deliberately permitted him to go!

Bennet sat up straighter on the cot, his body hunched forward tensely, his eyes straining at the darkness. Like the cogs of a smoothly running piece of machinery, certain facts began to fit in. Those hundreds of Arabs waiting there on the hot rocks. They *knew* that the column of the Legion was coming through there.

Bennet recalled the scene vividly. He recalled now what had vaguely struck him before, registering upon his subconscious mind—the grim air of expectancy breathing from those hundreds of prone men on the two ledges overlooking the canyon.

They weren't merely hoping that the column of the Legion would walk into the death trap; they *knew* that would happen. Knew with a positive, definite certainty. Knew because *it had been previously arranged.*

"The dirty little rat had sold out," Bennet said through clenched teeth. "Sold the lives of fifty men!"

Bennet hadn't meant the words literally at first, but he did a moment later as another thought flashed to his mind. And because he himself had been an officer once, a nausea gripped him.

"Of course," he said aloud. "Oh, of course. God!"

He recalled now a furtive conver-

sation Colbert had had with a Persian trader in the rear room of old Jorin's *estaminet*—a conversation abruptly terminated when Bennet had walked in. This had taken place exactly one week ago. And two days before that, two Englishmen had been butchered when Abdul el Ras' men had ambushed a caravan.

THE two Englishmen had been members of a British firm in El Harib. The firm had reported to Captain Renoult that the two men had carried with them the small fortune of ten thousand pounds in British banknotes. Useless paper to the Arabs, who couldn't possibly spend it; a negotiable fortune to a man returning to the continent.

But one thing the Arabs could use—and it was worth its weight in gold to them. Rifles and ammunition!

"Yes!" Bennet said savagely. "Oh, the filthy swine!"

He could not sit still. He stood up and tigerishly, ever bumping into the stone walls, began pacing the tiny cell. He felt ill.

Abruptly, there came a scraping sound at his door. Bennet paused, whirled. A metallic clang as the heavy bolt was drawn aside, then the massive door swung open. A cautious whisper:

"Sergeant! Come out."

Bennet walked out unhurriedly. The Devil's Squad stood in the narrow corridor. Saratof pressed forward.

"Now listen to me, my friend—and *don't* give me an argument. I know precisely what you will say at the court-martial tomorrow. You'll plead guilty. Captain Renoult will be forced to sentence you to ten years in the Penal Battalions. That's the very least he can give you."

Bennet looked quietly at the burly Russian. He said nothing.

"Very well," Saratof continued. "Here's a rifle and ammunition. In this bag you'll find food. And here's a double canteen of water. You should have no trouble reaching the coast. We have spoken to the sentries; they'll look the other way. Good luck, my friend!"

He stuck out his hand. Bennet gripped it.

"Better hurry, Sergeant," Hauser whispered. "They'll be changing sentries in a few minutes."

"Thank you, comrades," Bennet said slowly, "but—I have other plans. Follow me!"

HE ran down the length of the short corridor. Thirty seconds later he was out in the courtyard. The sentry, pacing the wall above, looked down for a moment, then walked away stolidly.

His iron-shod boots echoed hollowly on the stone.

Bennet crossed the courtyard to the stone steps, bathed softly by the moonlight. He took the steps three at the time, but he made no noise. Higher, higher, he climbed. He paused before a door near the top. It was the entrance to Colbert's quarters.

Saratof touched Bennet's shoulder.

"If you plan to kill him, my friend, I—wouldn't. Isn't worth it."

Bennet's lips twisted in a grim smile. "I won't kill him, but he'll wish I had."

Softly, like a huge cat, he padded into the dark room. Colbert was asleep, snoring loudly. Bennet bent over the bed. His hands shot out, gripped Colbert's shoulders. Lifted him out of the bed. Slammed him against the wall. He yelled at the top of his lungs:

"Where's the money? What did you do with the money?"

Colbert, still half asleep but frightened out of his wits, jerked his

hands to his stomach. It was all Bennet needed.

He threw the officer back on the bed. With one jerk of his hand, he ripped the top of Colbert's pajamas. A six-inch-wide money belt was strapped around Colbert's waist.

"Lie still, you rat," Bennet said quietly, "or I'll kill you."

Colbert fell back, trembling, almost paralyzed with fear. Bennet unhooked one of the many pockets in the belt. His fingers withdrew a thin sheath of bills. He struck a match, and the tiny flare revealed the price of treachery. Notes drawn upon the Bank of England, in twenty-pound-sterling denominations.

"You swine!" Bennet panted.

A cold voice came from the doorway:

"What's going on here?"

Captain Renoult, bare-footed and in his pajamas, stood outlined there in the semi-darkness. He was holding a big blue revolver.

"May I suggest that you shut the door, *mon Capitain*," Bennet said evenly.

RENOULT stared at him a moment. He nodded curtly, swung the door shut with his foot. Bennet crossed the room to an oil lamp bracketed to the wall and lighted it. He approached Renoult.

"I have taken this from Lieutenant Colbert's money belt, *mon Capitain*," he reported quietly. "British banknotes. There are many more where I found these. I venture to say the total amounts to ten thousand pounds—the exact amount taken from the two Englishmen by Abdul el Ras. It is payment for the blood of fifty men."

"Sergeant Bennet," Renoult commanded softly, "you will remove the belt from Lieutenant Colbert's body and bring it here."

Bennet obeyed. Renoult began

opening the pockets. Sheath after sheath of crisp new banknotes lingered for a moment in the captain's left hand before he dropped them on the table.

Renoult's face was now a granite mask. He dropped the belt.

"Have you anything to say, Lieutenant Colbert?"

COLBERT squirmed on the bed. He opened his mouth, but words refused to come forth.

"Perhaps," Renoult added, his face still expressionless, "you had better not say *anything*, Lieutenant. Perhaps, I had better leave you alone for two minutes. I may impress upon you before I leave that you are still wearing the uniform of a commissioned officer; your resignation does not take effect until it is approved by the War Department. So—I leave you alone, Lieutenant, *with this!*"

He tossed his revolver on Colbert's bed.

"Let us go, Sergeant."

They waited outside the door. A minute passed. Another. A single shot rang out from within the room.

"I feared," Renoult said quietly, "he might not have had the courage.

You were an officer once, weren't you, Sergeant?"

"United States Army, *mon Capitain*. Captain, field artillery."

"Good. You will understand. You will understand, Sergeant, that Lieutenant Colbert has committed suicide. An officer is a man of honor—ever. Lieutenant Colbert has committed suicide when his mind temporarily became deranged as the result of too many hours in the sun."

Bennet saluted. "Yes, *mon Capitain*."

"And since Lieutenant Colbert's mind had obviously been deranged, we may ignore his accusations against you. Good night, Sergeant."

"Good night, sir!"

"JUST one more thing, Sergeant.

The night is still young, and the *estaminet* should still be open. Company C has twenty-four hours leave of absence." He glanced bitterly at the closed door.

"Thank you, *mon Capitain*."

Again the Devil's Squad marched out into the night. Hauser raised his huge arms overhead and laughed deep in his throat.

"To hell and back, Sergeant—and it wasn't such a bad trip."

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GODS *of* GOLD



Red was firing at the approaching horde

*Big Jim Kenton and Red McCoy, Buddies, Mix It With
Savage Quechua Indians in this Thrill-Packed
Story of the Peruvian Andes*

By JOHN SCOTT DOUGLAS

Author of "Charmed Crates," "Bill the Conqueror," etc.

BIG, blondly handsome Jim Kenton, awoke with a start, his nerves taut and quivering. Instinctively he grasped his Colt before throwing some scrub sticks onto the ruby embers of last night's fire.

His rough-hewn body tensed, Jim strained to catch a repetition of that sound. Nothing disturbed the silence of the Peruvian Andes, however, save

the bubbling of the Urubamba River a dozen feet away and the slight whirring of a vampire bat overhead. The skyward-rearing peaks cast long shadows across the floor of the valley, and Jim tried to penetrate their inky depths.

The second blanketed figure stirred, sat up, rubbing sleep from blue eyes. The stocky, red-necked Texan, "Red"

McCoy, stared at Kenton's strong, grim face for a moment before asking, "What's the matter, Jim?"

"Thought I heard something, Red. Maybe I dreamed it."

Distinctly, then, came the sharp patter of sandalled feet, another scream. Jim caught the word, "Señor!"

They were both on their feet, Colts in hand. Jim started at a run toward the eastern crags when a figure emerged from the shadows—a lean, lithe figure in typical Quechua Indian garb.

SIMULTANEOUSLY, other figures materialized from the gloom. Stocky, powerfully-built Indians with gleaming machetes raised as they ran.

"Amando!" Jim cried hoarsely, as he stopped firing.

A poncho-mantled Indian staggered, fell. From the shadows came a blinding flash; then the whistle and whine of speeding lead. Ducking, Jim heard the rifle bullet sing close to his ear.

Red McCoy's blue eyes gleamed with a dare-devil light as he began popping at the pursuing score of figures. A second Indian twisted around crazily, to fall sideways. A third ran uncertainly several steps and fell face forward.

The pursuers hesitated, then turned and fled. But the spitting rifle continued to send lead whistling and whining around them, kicking up ugly spurts of earth, ricocheting from rocks and boulders with sharp, pinging sounds.

The lithe Indian in tattered rags joined them. White teeth contrasted sharply with his coppery skin as he flashed an infectious smile. He was a good looking young man, despite his ragged raiment, tall for his race, with midnight hair above a high, intelligent forehead.

The three men returned to the campfire, where jutting rocks and a rise in ground protected them from the rifle bullets.

"Be on your guard," warned Amando, smiling again. "Before day comes, you will be attacked, *señor!*"

"Attacked?" Red exploded, his wide humorous mouth tightening slightly. "What for?"

"You do not know you have camped at the base of the trail to Huayñu Picchu?" Amando asked, speaking in Spanish.

"No!" Jim exclaimed incredulously. "I don't believe it!"

"It's true, *señor.*"

Jim's jaw muscles showed white and strained under his tan.

"So that's it? Ed Roggen thinks I'm trying to grab those golden gods those drunken Indians were dreaming about night before last."

"They were drunk," said Amando. "But they spoke truly, *señor.*"

"Yeah?" Red inquired. "And we pitched camp accidentally at the base of the trail. What do you think of that, Jim?"

Jim turned to Amando. "Why are they pursuing you, Amando?"

"To kill me," he returned, shrugging. "I object to Scar-Face showing Roggen where the treasures of golden gods are hidden on Huayñu Picchu unless we are given money. Roggen promises only to give us all the liquor we can drink. It is not fair, and I would not agree."

WE had camped under the crags for the night when you and Señor Red came along the trail. Roggen ordered us to put out our fires and keep hidden. Finally I guessed the reason. They thought you intended to ascend the trail tomorrow to recover those treasures. When I came to warn you, I awoke Scar-Face. He and other Indians followed to kill me for being a traitor. Am I

that, *señor*, when you were always good to us?"

"So we're to be attacked tonight?"

Jim asked grimly.

"*Verdad*, tonight," said Amando.

Red's wide, humorous mouth quirked with a broad grin.

"Jim, what do you say we turn the tables on Roggen? He deserted us, took most of our food and our rifles, and is now planning to wipe us out. Why not go after these golden gods ourselves?"

"My idea, exactly," said Jim.

"Amando, would you lead us up the trail? We'll give you a share of anything we find."

Amando's coppery face shadowed. "I will lead you," he promised, "if we are alive tomorrow."

Jim forced a twisted smile to his lips. "I guess we can take care of that! Now you two get some rest. I'm going to stand first watch."

"Let me," Amando said eagerly.

JIM'S gray eyes narrowed a little. What was this—treachery? It occurred to him that the pursuit across the valley might have been staged for their benefit.

Jim had once saved Amando from drowning in the Urubamba. His gratitude had always seemed real. Better find out on which side he stood.

"Yes, you take first watch," Jim told Amando curtly. "But Red and I will keep the guns. Agreeable?"

Amando nodded. "At the first sound, I will awaken you."

Jim and Red piled into their blankets. But Jim did not sleep for a long time. From time to time he watched Amando's straight, supple back, trying to discover whether the young Indian was making signals. Apparently he was not, for he started at the slightest sound, peering about anxiously in the darkness.

Fatigue finally claimed Jim, despite his determination to keep

Amando under observation. The trek on foot along the Urubamba had been a hard one, and he was tired.

His first realization of his own lapse from vigilance came when he heard a sharp, thudding sound. Springing to his feet, gun in hand, he cried sharply, "Amando!"

Something swished by his head—a machete. Jim fired, heard a cry of agony. An arrow swished out of the darkness, passing over his head with a thin, high-pitched wail.

Jim dropped behind the rocks, and Red was beside him in an instant.

"Treachery?" Red inquired, as his gun lanced the darkness with flashes of flame.

"Don't know," Jim snapped. "I should have kept my eye on Amando!"

They banged away, emptying their guns. Reloading, Jim said:

"Hold it, Red! We may need it if they attack again. And we only have the shells in our belts, thanks to Ed Roggen."

They sat waiting for a renewal of the attack, stiff with cold at that ten thousand foot altitude but unwilling to build up the fire which would outline them to their enemies. And as they waited, Jim's mind went back to the events of two nights previous.

ENGINEERS for an American company building a trans-Andean railroad, Jim Kenton, Red McCoy and Ed Roggen found themselves the only white men in a group of sullen Quechua Indians laying out a right-of-way on the eastern slopes of the Andes of Peru.

Big Jim, not yet in his thirties but with a remarkable record of achievement behind him, was in charge of the job. And likable Red McCoy was Jim's man Friday. Where Jim went, Red went. They were inseparable—a convenient arrangement for Red, who would have gotten into

trouble under any other chief than Jim.

Red, when on occasional sprees, felt capable of licking the world with his fists. Only Jim's cool resourcefulness in such emergencies kept Red from having a knife in his back.

Ed Roggen was a different sort. A thin, tall, scrawny-necked man with pinched features and eyes which slid past you without meeting your gaze directly. But he was an engineer, too, and an American, so Jim and Red tried to make the best of him and hide their dislike.

Two nights previous, that had been hard. Work had ceased because of the Peruvian revolution and the question of whether the new government would pay for the railroad if it were built. Funds failed to arrive, due to military activities. Jim had to dole out what little food he had, to keep the Indians fed.

AND this was the time Ed Roggen chose to divide his whisky among the sullen natives. There was system in his madness, however, as Amando pointed out when he told Jim what was taking place. Roggen was trying to learn the truth about an ancient Inca fortress on the precipitous crags of Huayñu Picchu.

Amando, more intelligent than the other Indians, was the only one who would talk of the ancient fortress when he was sober. And he wouldn't talk to Roggen at any time. Roggen had once beaten him without reason. So the bullying engineer plied the Indians with drink to loosen tongues. They were superstitious about Huayñu Picchu. Not one of them dared touch the fabulous treasures which were reputed to be found there. Superstition said that whoever touched those treasures would lose that which he held most dear, and ill fortune would forever follow him. They were taking no chances.

But lead someone else there? That was different! Especially if that other person promised them whisky—all the whisky they could drink for days. And that was what Ed Roggen promised, greed in his black eyes.

Jim sailed into him at that point, speaking in English. He pointed out that their position was already sufficiently precarious—a thousand miles from the nearest American consul, without funds, with little food and in a barren country, and among a group of Indians to whom murder of a white man was something not to be thought of a second time. Why, Jim asked sarcastically, commit suicide by giving them whisky? And why, he added, if they revealed the hiding place of such treasures, shouldn't they have fair share of money as a reward, if they were afraid to accept a portion of the treasure? Roggen became nasty, and it was all Jim could do to keep from knocking him down, even among Indians who would have realized the significance of dividing the white man's forces. One, at least, would have realized his advantage. A brutal, savage-looking Indian whose swarthy face had been laid open at one time by a machete, giving him the nickname, "Scar-Face."

THE morning after that quarrel, Jim and Red found themselves deserted. Ed Roggen and the Indians had absconded with everything movable—the food, rifles, ammunition; everything but the tent in which the two men had slept, their blankets, their revolvers, and a scant amount of provisions which happened to be in their tent.

Stranded, it was necessary to strike out for Cuzco or starve. And strike out they had, pushing along the Urubamba with all the speed they could muster. Unwittingly, they had

camped the second night at the base of the trail to Huayñu Picchu, all unconscious that there was a trail or that Roggen's party was in the same valley.

Sunlight finally tinted the rugged crags to the eastward with pinks and saffrons. And by its first radiance, Jim and Red saw something causing their throats to tighten. Outside their barrier of rocks lay two dead Indians. One was the Indian Jim had shot. The other was Amando.

HE lay motionless, a supine figure with limp, outstretched arms. A machete protruded from his heart like a lean tombstone.

"Those murderers!" Jim said huskily. "They killed him while he slept, poor kid."

"And we thought he was responsible for that attack last night."

"Not him!" Jim muttered grimly. "He saved our lives."

Jim's gray eyes were bleak as he swept the floor of the valley. No sign of life visible. But the ground was rugged and broken to east and south—hundreds of men could hide in those arroyos.

"Least we can do, Red, is give him a decent burial."

"What I was thinking, Jim."

Quietly they scooped out the ground as best they could with a machete, laying Amando in the cavity. Then they filled it with earth, and laid a rock on top. They removed their hats, and stood with working faces for a moment. Hard men both, superficially, both were deeply touched by the loyalty which had cost the ragged Indian his life.

"Damn that treasure!" Jim said at length, a little bitterly. "If I'd known it would have cost Amando his life, I wouldn't have touched it, even though we are stranded."

Red's freckled fists clenched and his blue eyes became hard and grim.

"But I'll get it now," he said fiercely, "if it's the last thing I ever do. Let Ed Roggen have it after what he did to Amando? Not much!"

"He has a bunch of hostile Quechuas backing him," Jim reminded him.

The red-necked Texan snorted. "What of it? Ain't I got you?"

"You have." Jim's rugged, bronzed face relaxed in a faint smile. "I'm going after those gods of gold if for no other reason than to keep Ed Roggen from getting them. Murder us for that treasure, will he?"

Glancing down at the river, on whose brink they had pitched camp, Jim saw an old, twig-rung bridge spanning the boiling current. A vague trail led up a sheer, rocky pinnacle on the opposite bank. Dimly visible on the top of the pinnacle was a series of stone dwellings. This, Amando had told them, was an ancient Inca fortress which held the Urubamba against barbarians, for the river curved around the pinnacle in a hairpin turn.

"They thought we were holding the bridge," Jim mused.

"And we are," Red retorted grimly. "Against Roggen, anyway."

They ate breakfast in silence, warily watching for an attack. None came. But as they shouldered their knapsacks, the floor of the valley seethed with Indians who leaped from cover.

A RIFLE barked. Bullets pinged from rocks. Arrows wailed around them as the Indians approached, firing as they ran. Machetes gleamed blindingly in the sunlight.

"Make for the bridge!" Jim cried hoarsely.

Red was firing at the approaching horde. His shots dropped Indians but did not stop the advancing line. Their cries rose in a crescendo.

Jim dragged Red away, toward the

bridge. Bullets would not stop that swarm! They were drunk. Either drunk or drugged with coca!

Arrows swirled about them as they plunged down the bank. Several clinked against pans in Jim's knapsack. Shoving Red ahead, he tried to maintain balance on the swinging bridge. The corded liana vines creaked with their combined weight. Icy water tugged at their feet. Red splashed through the water, slipped on a damp run, and fell.

Jim grasped Red's hand as the raging water poured over him, threatening to carry him away. Bracing himself on the slippery bridge, he swung the gasping Texan to his feet. The thunder of tormented waters drowned out all sound of the Indians' approach. But, as they started forward again, the liana vines began to vibrate violently. The frail structure wobbled. Jim knew without looking back that rising and falling machetes hacked away the vines supporting the bridge.

HIS attempt to force the red-necked engineer ahead the few remaining feet failed. For the bridge suddenly sagged, listed precariously and then sank in the maelstrom. The swift arms of the current seemed determined to rip Jim's hand away from the vine he still gripped. Red had been flung free, but Jim had grasped his friend's belt. The pull of turbulent waters on Red's body, however, almost tore his arm from its socket.

Mountains of water pounded him down, down, down—rocks beat the breath from his body. He kicked like a burro, fighting his way to the surface to fill bursting lungs. He saw the Texan's red head.

Jim's leg caught in a vine. In this position, he worked his hand upward on the vine he held. His head was battered against a rock. A flash of

lightning streaked across his vision. Bulldog tenacity enabled him to cling to Red's belt until his benumbed head cleared.

His hand climbed upward again. Fresh air! A diapason of sound. The satanic bellow of the gorge. Another inch on the vine! Something solid gathered under his feet. A rocky ledge! He dragged Red out of the eddying current, shoving him up onto the bank. Then he clambered after him.

A machete clattered against rock just below Jim's rising leg, and bounced back into the water. Thrown accurately, it would have cleanly severed his leg!

"This way!" Jim gasped, breaking into a run.

Red, half drowned and still sputtering for breath, followed as Jim raced for a huge boulder. If they could reach it, they'd be protected from the opposite shore. Bows were raised hastily. Arrows thudded against the bank, bobbing their feathered tails after they were buried in the dirt. The Indians screamed like vultures over a kill.

Ed Roggen, running across the valley, raised his rifle, firing point-blank. Two bullets whined close, plopping into the bank.

GAINING the shelter of the big boulder, Jim glanced out. Several of the men fished for the cut vines of the bridge with machetes, leaning far over the water. The engineer seized a large, granite rock, hurling it. One Indian plunged into the water, swallowed almost instantly by the angry torrent. A fusillade of arrows rattled on the rocky face of the cliff.

"Got your gun?" Red gasped.

Jim shook his blond head. "Lost it when the bridge went down."

Red patted his own gun in its holster, groaning.

"We're sunk then, Jim. One Bowie knife of yours and my Colt against machetes, bows and arrows and Roggen's rifle."

Jim didn't answer. He continued throwing rocks. But the Quechuas warily dodged them, drawing back farther from the river. They were trapped on one side of the water; the sullen Indians seemed content enough to wait on the other.

But Ed Roggen wasn't content they should be on the same side of the river as the treasure. He was trying, from the shelter of a rock, to urge the Indians to recover the bridge before it was too late.

Red grimaced. "Maybe if we're careful, we could climb a little higher. Altitude wouldn't be any disadvantage!"

Jim nodded somberly. They hurried along the steep trail zig-zagging up the pinnacle, leaning low as they trod exposed portions. An occasional arrow sailed by them. Bullets occasionally dusted them with dirt. But the chief attention of those below was in repairing the bridge which they had fished from the river.

A TREMOR of apprehension raced down Jim's spine. Carelessness, letting them recover that bridge! They scurried up the slippery path, sending a shower of rocks splashing down the bank. From time to time, they had to stop to drive Roggen to cover when his shots sang too close. Whooping, the Indians raced across the repaired structure.

"Hurry!" Jim cried. "Forget Roggen for a minute, Red."

The stocky engineer looked down, instantly grasping the wisdom of this advice. Quechuas climbed like mountain goats. Red unloosened a huge granite boulder, poised it above his red head until one man stood directly below him, then flung it downward.

Even from that altitude, they heard

the striking rock. The Indian toppled for an instant on the brink of the chasm, then dropped like a plummet, a great splash of water blotting him from view.

The Indians paused, shouting vociferously. They raised their weapons—arrows spattered the rocky wall.

Splinters of rock struck both engineers crouching for protection against the bank. Jim kicked a huge rock off with his foot; then another. The arrows abruptly ceased whistling about their heads.

Jim and Red bounded along the trail again, leaning low, Indian-fashion. Jim seized a huge rock as he ran. Blue and yellow and red winged arrows sped around them, chipping off bits of granite. The medley of discordant voices below grew more intense.

Looking down, Jim saw Roggen. But the renegade vanished from sight around a turn. The brutal looking Indian with the red scar across his face was fleet of foot, despite his large size. A long-bladed machete gleamed wickedly in the fierce sunlight as he advanced almost at a run. Jim poised his rock, and sent it spinning through space.

Its slight *swish* proved warning to Scar-Face, however, for he checked his stride, and the rock missed him.

THE Urubamba became a snake-like thread as they ascended the almost invisible trail. Fear was absent from the faces of both men, though they knew death lay close behind.

Suddenly a dizzying throb of pain in his arm caused Jim to stagger. He dimly saw the inverted blue bowl of the sky through a sea of dancing black specks. His knees shook like aspen leaves. He was vaguely conscious of exclamations of anxiety, of the crack of an arrow, of something

tightening on his right arm. Red shook his senses back.

"Quickly, Jim!" Red begged apprehensively. "Can you walk?"

Jim staggered to his feet, his knees still wobbling incredibly. "I'm all right," he pronounced huskily, glancing at the piece of his shirt with which Red had bound his wrist. "That arrow gave me a shock!"

THE Indians climbed the second tier. Red worked a boulder loose from the bank, poising it on the brink. The missile careened downward, and bounced off a jutting tongue of rock. Flying twigs peppered the air. There was a powerful beating of wings, terrified screams, and two great birds circled their ruined nest and dead baby birds for a moment, and then soared upward.

"What did you do?" Jim asked thickly.

"Plenty!" Red's freckled face was pale. "Missed the Indians and struck a condor's nest. We'll have to run for it. Think you can make it, Jim?"

Jim nodded grimly. "Have to, now!"

Knowing a little of these largest of birds, Jim could appreciate the Indians' terror. His own heart had grown slightly cold as the condors circled upward. He struggled along behind Red until the trail abruptly vanished at a blank wall.

Red turned widening eyes on the huge, screaming birds circling closer and closer. Then he removed his shoes, slinging them around his neck, and dug in toes and fingers to ascend the niches in the rocky face of the cliff. Jim did likewise, following close behind.

But half way up the cliff, screaming knife-blades seemed to descend on his shoulders. Huge talons clawed at his face, wings beat his head to instant numbness. He clung to the

rock with aching fingers while his hand flashed for his Bowie knife. But as it gleamed silver in the sun, his wounded arm was laid open with a razor blade. Red flowed before his pain-filled eyes—then black, as the sun was blotted out by the great, ebony wings which were everywhere at once.

He was stabbing at space, wrenching his left hand until he nearly lost his balance. Talons ripped his knapsack to ribbons. The knife sank into yielding flesh, and a great clawing weight descended on his shoulders. Pain swept over his body in dizzying waves.

The pulse in his throat throbbed as he glimpsed Scar-Face climbing up the sheer rocky precipice like a monkey. His coca-stained teeth held a machete, and there was a drug-crazed look in his black eyes. Nothing but a silver thread of water and crags below! Jim's heart sank like a stone dropped into a bottomless abyss. If he succeeded in fighting off the condors, there was that scar-faced Indian with his gleaming blade—

The stabbing agony in his shoulders was unbearable. His knifed hand cut the wounded condor loose, and the beating of its crippled wings was like hail-stones on a roof. One gashing talon slashed at his cheek, and he was momentarily blind with pain. His finger-tips were loosening—

PAST experience told him Red was trying to get a shot. But what could he do? Firing at Scar-Face or the condors, he might hit Jim!

Jim thrust out his knife desperately. It brought forth a mighty cry of terror and pain from the second great bird. Blood gushed over Jim's face. A great weight hung on his knife, drawing him backward into nothingness. He released the knife, clutching the rocks, swaying—

"Jim! Jim!" Red cried, his voice seemingly coming from distance.

Jim saw the ugly-looking Indian through a red haze. Somehow he summoned sufficient strength to drag himself up the cliff, his torn body throbbing with dancing agony. Half-dead, Red pulled him up.

Red stared at him in glassy-eyed disbelief. He seemed frozen with inertia, as though he looked at a ghost.

Jim, in agony though he was, recovered first. As Scar-Face's brutal head appeared, he seized Red's gun, blazing away twice. The ugly mouth opened in pain. Then Scar-Face swayed, his hands clutching space, and a gaudily-clothed body sailed through the air like a stricken red parrot in the throes of death. Jim stood transfixed, staring, horrified.

RED was staring downward, now. Quechuas swarmed up the side of the cliff like marching ants. Jim pried a rock loose with his torn hand, turning it over until it reached the brink. One kick, and it bore down two of the climbing ants. But he couldn't move any of the other rocks—nor could Red.

The Texan reloaded the revolver with his last four shells. Four more Indians toppled into space. He flung the useless weapon at another Indian, striking him on the head. But, apparently, the coca-inflamed brains knew no fear. For they came on, climbing.

Red gripped Jim's arm. "See! The fortress of Huayñu Picchu! We will be safer there!"

Jim limped after Red across a rocky field that rose to a formidable fortress of gray stone—the fortress they had viewed from the valley. But, before they had half-crossed the field, singing arrows hummed in their ears, speeding them on their way. Jim stumbled and fell. Red ran to

his side, and pulled him forward though he protested thickly that he could reach security alone.

A huge, flat rock barred their way into the small doorway of the ground floor. Red shoved at it, but could not budge it. Jim leaned against it with his bleeding shoulder, assisting him. The balancing rock tottered on its narrow base sufficiently so they could pass into a shadowy chamber.

Jim could see dimly. Gray rock met his eyes on every hand. But, examining a row of *ollas* in niches in the wall, he found one extremely heavy.

"Gold!" he breathed softly, lifting it.

It broke from age in his hand, a shower of shining idols scattering about his feet. Little Inca gods of gold! The Indians had spoken truly! They were ensnared in a golden prison! Wonderingly, he and Red removed other *ollas* from their niches. A small one broke in Red's hands, and a greenish fire played on the walls from the gleam of crudely-cut emeralds. Of the other *ollas*, only one contained golden idols. But they were rich—rich beyond the dreams of Croesus.

JIM'S lips twisted in a pallid smile as he turned to Red McCoy.

"Enough wealth here to command legions, Red. And what will it buy us? Death! Death at the hands of a bunch of savages directed by Ed Roggen!"

Red's stocky body stiffened. "Not so much as a knife to protect ourselves! Doesn't look so good, Jim."

A tumult called them back to the balancing rock as Indians surrounded their barriered chamber. The barrier began to move as Roggen shouted orders. Jim grasped a small stone, and waited. A head crowded quickly through the small opening—the stone

descended and a machete clattered on the rocky floor.

Jim seized it, his heart bounding. The block regained its position, while the outcry grew more turbulent.

The rock moved again, a few inches. Desperately, Jim slashed with the machete. Two Indians fell, screaming in death agony. Red ducked low, seizing a machete before the rock regained its position.

The effort almost cost him his life. Ed Roggen fired the rifle which he had brought up on his back. The bullet whistled close to Red's ear.

"Go after them!" Roggen screamed in Spanish. "There are only two of them. Once the rock is moved, I can finish them with the rifle."

FOR several minutes the party outside argued. Then the rock started to move again. Jim and Red parried as though with a saber, and three Indians screamed with pain. Again the rock rolled back into position.

Although Roggen cursed and bullied them, none wanted to try again. Sullenly they answered Roggen's orders, adamant in refusal.

Darkness fell, after endless hours of waiting. Still the boulder was undisturbed, for Jim and Red stood weary vigil. They knew by the voices outside that their prison was well guarded.

They suspected that Roggen planned to starve them out. Their thirst was becoming vicious.

At last Jim turned to Red. "Wonder if there's any other way out of this trap?" he whispered.

"Guard the door and I'll try to find out," Red answered.

Probing at the close-fitting gray blocks, having little but hope to guide him, Red tried to slip his machete into cracks in the wall. After half an hour of persistent ef-

fort, he whistled softly as the machete loosened one of the stones. By an hour's determined effort, Red removed that huge block. Space met the thrusts of his blade.

Fresh air flowed through the open tunnelway.

"Escape!" Red exulted, his daredevil blue eyes lighting. "At least, we can lose nothing by trying it."

Jim nodded. He emptied the non-essentials from his knapsack, and Red did the same. Enough provisions to see them through to Cuzco, if they should escape, they kept. Then they divided the emeralds into the two sacks, adding as many of the golden images as they could carry. A fortune—if they reached civilization with it!

Red slipped through the opening first, and Jim heard him crawling along the dusty passage. He squeezed through, worming his way after him.

Jim judged this dusty old passage-way led to some legendary trail down the pinnacle known as Huayñu Picchu.

Faint light shone through the end of the tunnel. "Come on," Red hissed; "it's okay!"

RED had hardly spoken when a bullet whined. Red's fiery head disappeared. Something seemed to explode in Jim's brain.

Roggen!

He leaped through the opening, and saw the pinched-faced engineer lowering a smoking rifle. Red lay still, motionless.

A fury of desperation, of rage, blinded Jim to the fact that Roggen was hastily leveling the rifle for another shot.

Roggen, looking for another way to reach them, had come just in time to kill Red McCoy. Light-hearted, genial-natured Red McCoy! He hadn't had a chance! Badly torn

by those condors, weak from loss of blood, Jim Kenton didn't have a chance, either—but he didn't know it!

All he knew at the moment was that Roggen had killed the whitest man he'd ever known.

Roggen's pinched features swam through a red haze as Jim flung forward, sobbing with fury.

A bullet sent a shock of pain through his shoulder, but Jim scarcely noticed it.

Shaking with rage, his machete rose and fell and fell again, even after Roggen was long dead.

Indians appeared to investigate the shots. Arrows swirled about Jim. But in that white-hot fury, he scarcely realized his danger. He loaded the rifle from Roggen's belt, his hands shaking with anger, and fired.

Indians dropped, retreated. The slope above was dotted with colorful ponchos when Jim ceased firing.

Then he dropped on his knees

beside the stocky Texan. Red opened blue eyes, blinking dazedly.

"Did I fall?" he wanted to know.

Jim uttered a choked cry; then he laughed. Red had only been creased, as the crimson line in his flaming hair showed.

THEY bandaged each other's wounds. Darkness had fallen over the forbidding crests of the Andes. But, despite the risk, they did something no Indian would have attempted in darkness—they followed the forgotten trail down the peak, and reached the Urubamba.

There they found Roggen's camp, unguarded — the ammunition, rifles and provisions he had stolen from them.

Jim grinned in relief. "We have nearly a day's start on those Quechuas. We'll reach Cuzco yet with our treasure, you old fire-eater!"

"Hell!" Red laughed. "You don't strike me as such a peacemaker, yourself, Jim!"

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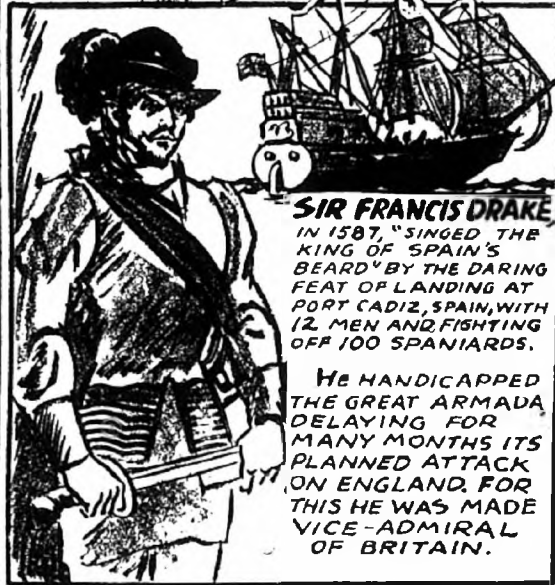


**ARTHUR
WELLESLEY**
"DUKE
OF
WELLINGTON"

ONE OF ENGLAND'S GREATEST GENERALS. HIS LONG AND VARIED FIGHTING CAREER IN MANY LANDS MADE HIM THE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF OF THE BRITISH ARMY AND GAINED FOR HIM 56 TITLES IN IRELAND, PORTUGAL, SPAIN, NETHERLANDS, FRANCE, RUSSIA, AUSTRIA, PRUSSIA, SWEDEN AND DENMARK.

WHEN NAPOLEON ESCAPED FROM ELBA, WELLINGTON, IN CHARGE OF THE BRITISH FORCES AT THE GREAT BATTLE OF WATERLOO, JUNE 15, 1815, CRUSHED THE POWER OF THE "LITTLE EMPEROR."

WELLINGTON WAS THEN CREATED FIELD-MARSHALL OF THE ARMIES OF RUSSIA, PRUSSIA AND AUSTRIA. ALSO, HE WAS GIVEN BY PARLIAMENT A GIFT OF \$3,000,000.



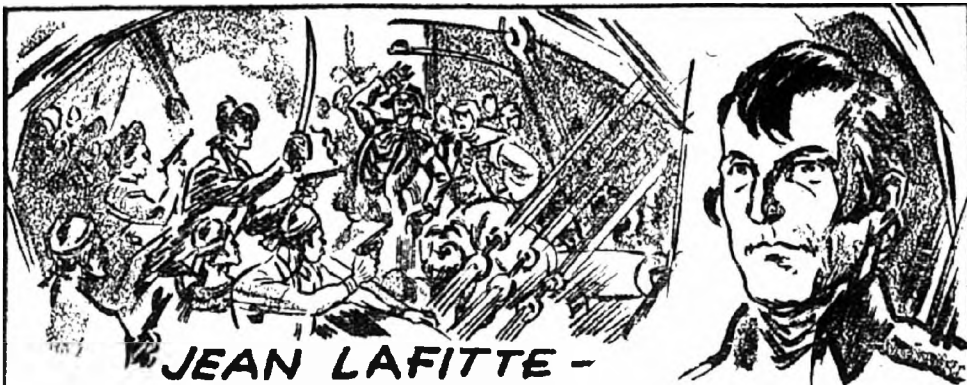
SIR FRANCIS DRAKE
IN 1587, "SINGED THE KING OF SPAIN'S BEARD" BY THE DARING FEAT OF LANDING AT PORT CADIZ, SPAIN, WITH 12 MEN AND FIGHTING OFF 100 SPANIARDS.

HE HANDICAPPED THE GREAT ARMADA, DELAYING FOR MANY MONTHS ITS PLANNED ATTACK ON ENGLAND. FOR THIS HE WAS MADE VICE-ADMIRAL OF BRITAIN.



**OLDEST SOLDIER
IN THE U.S.**

JOHN J. VAN DUZEN, 84, IS THE OLDEST SOLDIER IN THE U.S., IN POINT OF SERVICE AND AGE. VAN RECEIVED AN HONORABLE DISCHARGE ON DEC. 12, 1924 AFTER FIFTY YEARS OF ACTIVE SERVICE.



JEAN LAFITTE -

THE FIGHTING PIRATE WHO TURNED PATRIOT AND HELPED IN THE MAKING OF THE NATIONAL HISTORY OF AMERICA.

DISREGARDING THE FACT THAT A PRICE HAD BEEN SET ON HIS HEAD HE ENTERED NEW

ORLEANS IN DECEMBER 1814 AND WITH THUNDERING GUNS AIDED GENERAL JACKSON IN FRUSTRATING THE BRITISH INVASION AND CONQUEST OF LOUISIANA.

AFTER THE BRITISH WERE FORCED TO RETREAT JEAN LAFITTE WAS GRANTED A FULL PARDON IN RECOGNITION OF HIS EXTRAORDINARY SERVICE.



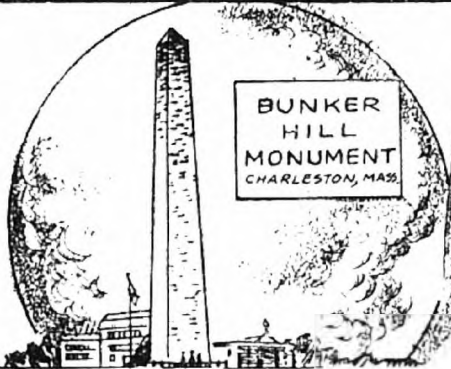
MAJOR-GENERAL CHARLES MORTON

U.S.A. WORLD WAR HERO, WHO SAW 50 YEARS OF ACTIVE SERVICE IN FOUR CAMPAIGNS WITHOUT A SERIOUS WOUND, WAS KILLED BY A SMALL FIRECRACKER IN 1933. WHEN A SLIGHT BURN DEVELOPED BLOOD POISONING.



LIEUT. FRANK LUKE,

"THE BALLOON BUSTER" OF ARIZONA, WHO SAW ONLY SEVENTEEN DAYS OF ACTIVE SERVICE IN AN A.E.F. FLYING CORPS, BROUGHT DOWN FOURTEEN BALLOONS AND DID OVER A MILLION DOLLARS' WORTH OF DAMAGE.



BUNKER HILL MONUMENT CHARLESTON, MASS.

A BATTLE THAT WAS NEVER FOUGHT IS COMMEMORATED BY A MONUMENT. WRITTEN ORDERS WERE TO FORTIFY BUNKER HILL, BUT THE BATTLE WAS FOUGHT ON BREEDS HILL.

ISLAND of MAGIC DEATH

*A Gripping, Tense Drama
of a Mysterious, Sinister
Plot for the Domination
of the World!*

A Complete Novelette

By **FREDERICK C. PAINTON**

Author of "Skies of Doom," etc.

CHAPTER I

Stranded

OUT of the sea it loomed, a purple green mass of impenetrable jungle, topped by the brown cone of an ancient volcano crater. Silent, sinister, it seemed to frown at the intrusion of the trim white schooner that dropped her hook in the translucent waters of the blue lagoon.

The Island of Magic Death!

Steve Vance, standing at the bulwark, felt the spell of the island, sensed the grimness of it. The trades roaring through the swaying palms seemed to hiss a warning to him to stay aboard the *Island Trader* and leave in eternal peace the mystery that was here.

The young American was not alone in feeling the ominous atmosphere



Vance fired, and the Malay

of the small isle. It was communicated to the Kanakas. They moved about their business under the lashing voice of Captain Anton Roober, but they cast apprehensive glances toward the forbidding littoral. They would be glad to leave this spot of death, and they showed it in every move.

Roobar himself was worried. When the small boat was dropped alongside the schooner's hull, he came forward and his big hand fell gently on Vance's shoulder.

"Don't be a fool, lad," he rumbled. "You were tricked, the same as the others. If you go ashore you'll never leave alive."

He stared at the somber contours of the island. "By God, I've brought



fell back with a screech of death

four poor devils to that island—and they're all dead. I'd give a lot to know how and why they died, but I wouldn't spend twenty-four hours ashore there to find out."

It was for that purpose that Vance had come to the island. A special agent, he had been sent there by Sir John Petry, head of the British East India secret police, to investigate those four mysterious deaths.

"Yes, I have heard about those four men," said Vance. "The first was a man named George Barnard, wasn't it?"

"It was," the captain nodded. "He sailed with me after he had bought the so-called rubber plantation from an American of doubtful repute—Manhard Johnson was his name. I

left Barnard here with a Malay servant. When I returned a month later I found the Malay had vanished and Barnard's decomposed body was in the go-down. There was no sign of murder or foul play."

"And later Johnson sold the plantation to Simon Mortar. Johnson claimed that as long as Barnard was dead and had no family, the property reverted to him," said Vance. "You found Mortar dead, not a mark on him. Then Johnson sold the place to Ellison Carver, who also died, after which Johnson claimed it again and sold it to Henry Osgood, who also joined the list of the mysteriously dead."

"That's right," Rooper nodded. "And now you have bought it from

Johnson. Ah, well, it's getting on to sundown. Better get ashore."

Wong Fu, Vance's faithful Chinese servant, piled baggage in the boat and sat atop it, grinning at Vance like some yellow ape. The American poised himself and dropped into the stern sheets of the small boat. He forced a smile, waved his hand. "See you next month, Skipper."

The small boat moved through the clear water of the lagoon, smashing the blue mirror of it, distorting the white bottom that was visible fifteen fathoms down.

The trip was made in silence. The Kanaka rower was uneasy and Wong Fu, who had been with Vance for seven years, recognized the silent mood of his master. The bow of the boat grated on the sand and the Kanaka began heaving the baggage ashore.

He worked swiftly, and rowed with unnatural energy back to the schooner.

Vance turned his back to the gradually deepening shadows of the jungle and took his last look at the ship. Through his mind passed the memory of one thing he had not told Roober. The deal with Johnson had hardly been completed before a Malay knife had flashed through the open window of Vance's hotel room. The blade had plunged into Johnson's back, killing him instantly. Vance had searched the vicinity of the hotel, but had been unable to find any trace of the murderer.

ACROSS the still, clear water came the creak of blocks, the hoarse rumble of Roober's voice. And presently with the main sail up and the auxiliary engine giving her way, the *Island Trader* put about and stood for the channel through the coral reef where the tidal currents boiled in seething torment. The schooner dipped to the heaving swells and,

with canvas drawing, bore away before the humming trades.

Vance watched her until she was nearly hull down. Then he shrugged and flung away the cigarette. The decision was made. He was stranded for at least a month on an island twenty miles in diameter, a thousand miles south of Singapore. An island where four white men and four servants had met strange death.

"Come along, Wong," he tried to inject a cheerful note in his voice.

BEFORE him on a slight rise loomed the unpainted bungalow. The fading sun reflecting in its few windows seemed to make of them yellow eyes that smouldered at him. The hot, fetid jungle pressed upon it almost with physical force. He was glad enough to lay down his gun-case and go back and help Wong Fu with the rest of the baggage. Vance himself handled the bedding roll.

The sun was sliding into the sea when they had finished the job. In silence Vance pulled out the key that had come from the murdered Johnson's effects.

He went to insert it in the padlock—and stopped, frozen by what he saw.

The padlock was not closed; the hasp hung back. The door was not locked!

"And Johnson said it was," muttered Vance uneasily.

Instinctively he moved silently, alertly, when he thrust open the door and strode into the great living room. His eyes sought a human form, but there was none. But what he saw was almost as surprising.

On the large round table that supported the kerosene lamp was food. Rice crumbs. And when he touched them they were soft and fresh. An empty beer bottle, when lifted, revealed a rim of wet.

"Somebody's been here—and recently," he said.

"*Aie, Tuan, mebbu Dyak.*"

VANCE smiled grimly. "Dyaks do not drink beer; and I don't think they eat fish curry." He shrugged angrily.

"Dammit, I'm letting this thing get my goat. Break open that box of canned stuff and get supper, Wong. There's the kitchen."

Wong Fu's slippers slap-slapped about the job. Vance followed him to the kitchen and was somehow glad that he was not alone in this bungalow. The Chinese had lit a bracketed kerosene lamp with a reflector and he moved around in the saffron radiance, casting a long black shadow that climbed the wall beyond.

Vance suddenly bethought himself of his bedding roll and what it contained. He returned to the living room and unfastened the straps. Out of the center he removed ten dry-cell batteries, one small wet battery and a portable, small radio sending set. He carried these articles to a big bedroom, and there, with experienced fingers, hooked wires to terminals and prepared the set for instant use.

Once a grim smile curved his lips. "I've an idea it'll be handy," he muttered.

He covered the set with a canvas ground sheet and returned to the living room and lit the lamp. Here he occupied himself for fifteen minutes, setting up his cot, getting out his blankets and checking his ammunition. Wong's voice came to him from the kitchen. The Chinese always sang as he worked. Vance could tell how nearly supper was ready by the number of verses sung.

The big kerosene lamp sent a ruddy glow over the room. Vance sat down and began to think. He smelled danger on this island—deep

peril—and he was practically all alone.

He brooded there in the chair, his ruddy, bronzed face revealed in saffron light and black shadow from the lamp. A strong face, and a puzzled one. To his unhearing ears came the boom of the surf, the hiss of the wind in the palm fronds.

Suddenly he came bolt upright, his heart pounding like mad. From the kitchen echoed a shrill scream. A yell of horror, of pure terror.

"*Tuan—tu—*" the sobbing shriek rose, cutting like a knife blade, then stopped as if pinched off at the throat. An instant later there was a smash of broken pottery, followed by the thud of a fallen body. Vance bounded to his feet, snatched at his Webley and raced to the kitchen.

"Wong!" he yelled. "Wong Fu!"

THE heavy silence mocked his cry. The kitchen door was ajar; so he did not have to reveal himself as a target for a possible intruder when he peered cautiously through the opening.

"My God!" he cried in a low voice.

The slack figure of Wong Fu was stretched on the floor near the steel sink. And it took but one look at the flat, punctured appearance to tell Vance the man was dead.

Vance's next move was purely instinctive. He crouched low and circled until he was able to see into every portion of the kitchen. No one was there. A glance at the rear door showed it locked and bolted. None had come that way. And the screening in the single window was intact.

"And no one passed me to enter from the living room." He mused aloud, as if his own voice were a comfort in this dread silence.

He went at last to Wong Fu's body. The light from the kerosene lamp picked it out as in a spotlight's

glow. The body lay at the base of the steel sink, legs drawn up, arms outspread and fists clenched. The eyes were open, revealing a terror that made Vance glance away and suck in his breath. The brown lips were peeled back from the black teeth.

Vance's first examination revealed no sign of how the Chinese had met his death. He searched for a wound, and did not find it.

"Strange," he muttered, and fell to stripping the lean body. The silence was so oppressive that the rasp of the dead man's clothing was audible for yards. Carefully Vance searched. The head, the torso, the arms and then the legs.

"By God!" he marveled, "not a mark on him."

The brown skin was without a blemish. In utter bewilderment he finally examined the dead man's feet, for Dyaks were known to leave splinters around with *ipoh* poison on them. There was no mark on the calloused soles.

Vance straightened, stood up. He couldn't believe what his eyes told him. He stood against the door jamb, staring upon the scene. The silence struck at him like a physical force, the silence out of which death had smote so savagely, so mysteriously. What kind of death? What had murdered poor Wong?

"Island of Magic Death!" he heard himself say. "God, what a swell name!"

CHAPTER II

The Mysterious Chinese

THE monkeys racketing in the false dawn woke Vance from his last cat-nap. He put aside the Cordite rifle that had lain across his lap all night, removed the chairs that he had placed on the balance

before the doors, and got breakfast. Cautiously he recovered canned stuff from the kitchen and wolfed cold food on the veranda. The rotted go-down yielded a rusty shovel and he buried Wong Fu on the edge of the jungle.

Anger shook him, for Wong had been faithful and loyal. "There'll be a reckoning, you poor devil, I promise."

And those were the only words of the burial service.

Vance spent the greater part of the day walking up and down the sandy beach examining his island prison, looking for a break in the jungle, a trail.

But he found none.

It was possible, he discovered, to work inland by following the small river that poured into the lagoon; and he determined to investigate it on the morrow. Somewhere on this island men were alive—dangerous men, killers.

He returned to the bungalow at dusk, made another meal on the veranda and prepared himself for the night. With darkness a tenseness gripped the place. He was alone, as if in solitary confinement, and he found himself talking aloud frequently just to hear the sound of his own voice.

AGAIN he cocked chairs on the balance against the doors. He strewed papers around his cot so their rustling would notify him of an intruder. He saw to his weapons. Despite himself the thought kept recurring: "They got Wong. Am I next?"

Finally he dozed, and actually slept—

Moonlight streamed palely through the windows when he came suddenly, alertly awake. He listened intently. The night wind soughed in the trees; the dull boom of the surf thundered

in his ears. But presently he heard another sound.

Human sounds!

Silently he came to his feet and stole to the veranda. The moonlight reflected from the white sand of the beach, painted it like snow. Plainly, indeed, he could make out a *prau*, see black silhouettes moving on the beach.

"What the devil does this mean?" he muttered.

Black shadows on the white beach moved; the *prau* shoved off and turned south in the lagoon. He heard the creak of blocks, the rattle of a lateen sail.

BUT not all of the shadows had gone. One remained. This one stood for a second watching the vessel. Then, placing a bundle on his back, this man turned and walked up the beach toward the river.

Within a few moments the *prau* melted into the blue-white of the lagoon. But Vance perceived one thing; the boat did not stand out through the channel to the sea, but continued down the lagoon, skirting the shore. He was to remember that fact later.

He crept off the porch, hid himself on the edge of the beach in some bougainvillea. The moon's rays were like pale daylight and he could see that the plodding bent figure approaching him was that of a Chinese.

As he came closer, Vance perceived in surprise that he wore a richly brocaded gown. This was no coolie, no Straits Settlement Chinese, but a high-class Oriental, perhaps one of mandarin rank.

The Chinese went on past, his felt slippers hissing in the sand. Vance glanced at the illuminated dial of his wrist watch.

Four o'clock! Daylight would soon come.

Six-gun in hand, he stole up the

beach in pursuit. Keeping always fifty yards behind the plodding figure, Vance did not find his task difficult, for the Chinese did not look back.

They had covered some five miles by Vance's reckoning when the American heard a heavy sullen roar. The trail had zig-zagged and moved definitely away from the river. Gradually the sound grew louder. A waterfall.

He had lost sight of his quarry now, and so was surprised when the trail burst suddenly out onto a narrow stream coursing furiously down over shelving limestone ledges. Vance took cover in the edge of the foliage and looked up-stream. Then he looked down-stream.

"The hell!" he muttered, gazing at the foaming falls just ahead.

The water cascaded down from a height of fifty feet. It was not thirty yards from him, this waterfall.

But the Chinese had vanished!

VANCE hesitated in bewilderment. Then he went forward, so close that the spray soaked him. He scanned the cascade with narrow eyes and perceived that the limestone edge on either side started to curve inward so as to make a hollow behind the sheet of falling water. He did not hesitate. Gulping a big breath he deliberately dove through the curtain of water.

He found himself in a cavity behind the falls that was yards deep and that worked upward in a series of jumps like a terrace. Twenty-five feet above him, scarcely visible in the greenish light, was a large black orifice that seemed to lead into the bowels of the earth. A small stream gushed from this and added its water to the main falls.

Vance climbed up to it, found utter blackness within. What lay

within that dark shaft? Or beyond?

Vance's teeth clicked. "That guy *must* have come this way," he muttered and plunged within.

It was a blind groping advance; he caromed off rocky outgrowths, fell headlong into holes in the flooring. On occasion the noise of his advance reverberated weirdly and he knew he was in some sort of cavern. Blackness lay on him, but he never ceased his forward movement.

As he went on, there came to his ears a steady moaning drone that grew gradually louder. He was almost to the sound itself when it stopped as suddenly as it had begun. There was utter silence. What was that moaning drone? Vance shrugged—just another of the mysteries he must solve.

HE felt as though he had been in the shaft for hours before he saw a round, white spot ahead that marked its end. As he approached the opening, he saw sunshine beyond. It suddenly came to him where he was.

"That's the crater of the volcanic peak I saw from the *Island Trader*," he muttered.

Evidently the shaft through which he had approached was the ancient bed of a stream. Some volcanic convulsion had closed it and shifted the stream's bed. Looking out through the opening, he could see the ancient crater walls looming a hundred feet and more high, making this valley the bottom of a cup.

These walls surrounded a plateau at least a half mile square. To the right was a small lake, or rather, pond; to the left was a mass of green foliage. And peering out of it was a red bungalow. This bungalow sat on a rise of ground, and was half-buried in palms, mimosa and waist-high bougainvillea.

Vance stared at it, bewildered.

How did this house come here? Who had chosen this empty island for an abode?

While he stood debating his next step he heard singing. The next instant a girl came down a path to the veranda of the bungalow. She wore a native sarong pulled tightly around a slender figure. But what made Vance bite down on an exclamation was her face. It was pinkly white, with a mass of blonde hair above it. The girl was white; more, she was beautiful. She went into the bungalow in a carefree happy manner.

A vast curiosity as to the house engulfed Vance. The Chinese he had followed was no longer in sight; presumably he had gone in. On the impulse Vance dropped to his stomach and began a careful crawl through the thick vegetation. In this manner he circled the bungalow and reached some lava outcroppings in the back. Here he hid himself and peered at the house.

He was within twenty-five feet of what apparently was the living room, for it was almost open to the air with its several windows and French doors.

At the moment it held no occupant, but Vance had barely screwed himself down when tragedy came into the room.

IT was as if he held a front seat at a stark drama, with death the master of ceremonies.

A tall, brown man with an imperious carriage was the first to enter. He was wrapped in a gaudily colored native sarong, and he walked like a monarch. Six feet in height, with slim torso, he had a magnificent head that caught and held Vance's eyes. Black hair swept away from a high forehead. Flashing dark eyes looked out from under overhanging brows. A black, curled beard and mustache hid the lower part of the face and

added to his splendid appearance.

This man seated himself in a red lacquered chair. Almost at once the same Chinese whom Vance had followed entered and made a slight bow.

For a moment there was silence. Then the Chinese spoke:

"You have caught me, El Falaky," he said quietly. "I have brought the price of my life." He reached under his brocaded gown and produced a bamboo joint. This he opened, and there tumbled into his hand three magnificent pearls and a ruby that glowed like a drop of living blood.

He extended them to the man called El Falaky.

THE latter took the jewels carefully, closed his fingers around them as one would a pair of dice.

"These cannot buy your life, Chang, nor ten thousand like them. You have betrayed me. You would have ruined my life's work." The voice was beautiful; low, truly pitched like the plucked string of a bass 'cello.

"You would wreck my country," shrugged Chang, showing no emotion at the other's words. "I did not understand, when I first accepted your—"

"Do not lie. You know what I planned, what I have worked eight years to accomplish. And now, when I am on the verge of striking, you would destroy all. Your life is cheap revenge for that, Chang."

The Chinese shrugged fatalistically. "Better my life than a hundred thousand of my people."

"So to save others you would have gone to Petry of the British?"

Vance's eyes widened. What was this about Petry?

"Yes, I would have gone to Petry. Only he can prevent your ruin of mine and other countries."

"And you went to this Johnson to demand he join you," went on El

Falaky implacably. "After I had warned him to stop selling his plantation to stupid English, you go to him to get his help to charge their murders against me. You might be interested to know I had Johnson killed that very night."

"I know it," said the Chinese calmly.

"That leaves nothing more to say," murmured El Falaky. "Meantime, let us consider something beautiful. Do you see that chased silver box on the table?"

The Chinese turned to a pearl-inlaid teakwood table upon which reposed a beautiful silver-chased box. He walked toward it. The way he walked brought Vance a premonition of disaster. He walked as a man to the gallows.

He stood there, head turned to El Falaky

"Pick it up, examine it," invited the latter. "Not many more perfect examples of carving are to be found."

Frozen, eyes staring, Vance watched. The Chinese bent forward, placed his hands on the box, lifted it perhaps an inch.

AND then he stiffened, reared backward until he made an arch of his body. His knees slackened. He went forward, plunged against the teakwood table and dropped slackly, like an empty suit to the ground. Vance knew the Chinese was dead—murdered by the magic death.

El Falaky stood up, clapped his hands. Two Malays entered and carried the body from the room. Then the imperious man with the Arabic name strolled casually from the room.

Ten minutes later Vance saw the two Malays spading a hole for the Chinese's grave.

"What the hell!" he muttered. For the second time in thirty-six hours

murder had been done on this sinister island.

CHAPTER III

Fight in the Shaft

VANCE realized during the next few minutes that he had stumbled upon something colossal, a mystery that had world connotations. Petry was right. This was no longer a matter of who had killed four duped Britons. Behind this red bungalow, in that strange man called El Falaky, was a malignant evil.

Vance, wriggling along in the underbrush toward the shaft, felt like a wild animal escaping the net. Moving forward at the rate of a yard a minute he had the tense feeling that someone was watching him, or for him, from the bungalow. But there was no sound, no outcry to break the unnatural quiet. He drew a huge breath of relief when, at last, he was able to straighten within the darkness of the shaft.

He had made up his mind what to do, but time was the essence of the plan.

The plush-thick blackness of the shaft closed about him. Once he gave a terrible start, for that same odd, droning sound seemed to come from beneath his very feet. But it did not last thirty seconds; then all was ghastly silence as before. His feet clicked on rocks; his breathing sounded in his own ears. The darkness seemed blacker than ever.

He had gone possibly a half-mile toward the falls, could, indeed, hear the steady roar of them, when he heard voices.

He shrank against the wall, stiffened into immobility. Around the corner of a rocky outcropping ahead a flashlight glowed. Several voices mingled together. He made out at

least four, but the echoes prevented an accurate estimate.

It was the light that spelled Vance's end. He could not hope to evade the oncoming men in this part of the passage, which was only ten feet wide. Retreat to the bungalow was impossible. His hand hovered on his gun.

It was pure fortune that the leader of the approaching men stumbled over a rock at this juncture and dropped the flashlight. He cursed—cursed in English! Vance knew it immediately for an American voice.

The flashlight winked out; the shaft was again gripped by blackness. Instantly Vance sprang into motion. Hugging the wall he worked forward to get past these men before the light flicked on.

The chattering in Malaysian served to cover what noise he made. He came opposite to them. His hopes began to rise. In another second he would be past and the men, blinded by their own flashlight, could not see back of them unless they happened to swing the light.

BLINDLY, groping, he flung his hand ahead to feel along the shaft wall. Too late he tried to draw it back.

His out-stretched fingers had punched squarely into the yielding flesh of a man!

A wild yell roared in his very ears. A lunging body crashed into him; hands reached out and clawed at his clothing.

"*Tuan!*" screamed the voice. "The magic light. *Tuan!*"

In a twinkling the flashlight glowed; the oval of radiance snared Vance and held him in its spotlight. A Malay, eyes flashing, mouth contorted and white teeth shining, bounded at him with a kris flashing. Vance fired and the reverberations of the explosion were like the roar

of many cannons. The Malay fell back with a screech of pain.

Another came forward. Vance was delayed only a second, but it was enough. A huge form lunged at him. A hand knocked aside the Webley, seized his gun wrist, while the other hand grabbed him around the waist and swung him free of the ground. Struggling, kicking, he was flung down to land with a terrific crash that knocked the wind completely out of him. The body fell upon him, literally, and pinned him helpless.

"Do you quit?" growled a voice, "or do you want to lose your breath for good?"

THERE were barked commands in Malaysian and Vance found himself bound hand and foot with a speed that seemed impossible. Only then did the huge form that held him fast rise, and a veritable giant loomed in the weird light.

"Who are you?" this man asked, still in English.

"What difference does it make to you?" growled Vance.

"Not a hell of a lot," replied the man. "But it may make some difference to you. Anyway, we'll get you out in the light and see what this is all about. *Ali!*"

He roared a command and two of the Malays stood Vance upright. The cords on his feet were loosened sufficiently for him to take short mincing steps. Driven by the giant, he was forced back the way he had come. Vance moved in angry silence, and the big man had nothing to say until they stood once again in the brilliant yellow sunlight of the crater.

"You can talk to me," he said, "and you'd better. El Falaky has a way of making people talk, but it's not pleasant."

Vance stared at him. The man

was a giant. He was six feet five if he was an inch, and built in proportion. He must have weighed two hundred and forty pounds, yet he did not look to have a spare ounce of flesh on him. He returned Vance's stare with mild curiosity.

"I bought the bungalow on the beach," said Vance finally, pretending an angry innocence. "I was wandering around trying to find the man that tricked me and saw you. I followed you and got lost in the shaft."

"Hm!" muttered the man. "If you don't lose yourself permanently, then my name ain't Corcoran."

He left out a bellow of sound that was answered by a shout from the red bungalow. He thrust Vance before him up the pathway. As they approached a figure came out on the veranda. Vance saw it was the girl of the sarong. But she no longer wore the native garb; instead her slender grace was clothed in a summer frock that was Parisian and expensive.

Her blue eyes widened in amazement as the man who called himself Corcoran cuffed Vance up the steps.

"What is this, Mr. Corcoran?" she gasped.

"Where's your father?" asked the man.

"He's inside—here he comes now. But why do you tie him, Mr. Corcoran?" She smiled in friendly fashion at Vance. "He doesn't look like a criminal."

VANCE smiled back, but his mind was busy. Could this girl be the daughter of the man called El Falaky? Before he had time to think on the point the tall, bearded man he had seen earlier in the day, entered. He, too, had shifted to European habiliments, and wore a white drill suit, silk shirt and white suede slippers. The European clothes

served to enhance his arrogant dignity.

His flashing, dark eyes darted from Vance to Corcoran.

"What is it, comrade?" he asked easily.

Corcoran explained what had occurred. "So," he concluded, "I brought him back."

"And you?" the flashing eyes shifted to Vance and pinned his gaze.

"My name's Vance," was the reply. "I bought a plantation down on the shore—from a crook named Johnson. I came to see how badly I was rooked. My native servant was killed—or murdered—by something, and when I saw a Chinese come up the beach earlier this morning, I followed. I got lost. Then I saw this man and the natives and followed. I got lost again in the shaft."

COVERTLY he watched El Falaky's face to see how the explanation was received.

"Surely," cried the girl, "he is not a criminal. Please unfasten his hands. He should be a guest here—the only other whi—er—stranger on the island."

"If he means us no harm, Udine," replied El Falaky evenly. "we certainly mean him none. You had best go to your room. If Mr. Vance is all he says he is, you will see him again at dinner time."

For a moment the girl seemed about to protest; then El Falaky transfixed her with his blazing eyes, and Vance saw the will go out of her. Obediently she turned and left the veranda. Vance recognized in her actions a case of pronounced hypnotic influence.

With a knife El Falaky struck loose the cords. "That's all, Corcoran." He spoke in flawless English. "Many thanks. You remember, of course, Thursday."

"Sure, Chief, sure," said Corcoran, and departed.

"Come with me, Mr. Vance," El Falaky gestured toward the sitting room. He followed Vance in and saw him seated in a chair opposite to the red lacquer one in which he himself sat.

"Explain everything," he ordered peremptorily. "Tell me everything about yourself."

For the next fifteen minutes Vance underwent an ordeal that had him sweating. He told his story, and was taken over it with savagely asked questions that had the skill of a prosecuting attorney in them. It was a cross-examination such as he had never encountered before. With those flashing eyes on him, he dared not hesitate a second in a reply; dared not wet his lips, let his eyes fall away from those blazing ones. He knew his life hung in the balance of plausible, quick replies.

When El Falaky finally had no questions left to ask, Vance did not dare even wipe the perspiration from his forehead. Suddenly the man stood up, smiled and came over with outstretched hand.

"I'M deeply sorry, Mr. Vance," he

I said winningly, "to have been so rude to you. But this is a lonely island and we dare not take chances with strangers. I hope you will consider yourself our honored guest."

Vance murmured something about its being all right and successfully concealed his relief. El Falaky gave him a cigarette and a light from a regulation box of matches. Then the man began to discourse of sundry things. Vance listened, tense, suspicious. Then out of a clear sky El Falaky asked:

"Would you mind looking at that chased box on the table? The one in silver. I've been told its rare workmanship makes it valuable. Per-

haps you could give me your judgment."

Vance looked at the teakwood table. He fought down the chill of fear.

The silver box was the one he had seen the Chinese start to pick up when he dropped dead.

"Very interesting," he managed to murmur.

"Pick it up," suggested El Falaky cordially. "Examine it closely. I think it is a beauty."

Vance got to his feet and went to the table. He was glad his back was to El Falaky, for his lower lip was caught in his teeth and the sweat beaded on his forehead. To pick the box up might be instant death; not to pick it up was to disclose the tissue of lies he had spun. Was El Falaky deliberately killing him? Should he turn, fight, or—? His body was rigid.

He forced his hand to the box and picked it up. He turned it over, examined the interior and then placed it back where he had found it. "Good example of Malayan workmanship," he said and coolly swung to face El Falaky. The man's eyes found his; Vance stared back boldly.

For a second or so their glances locked. Then El Falaky got up and thrust his arm through Vance's. "Come look at my place," he invited. "We've just about time before tiffin."

Had Vance silenced his suspicion? He hoped, yet he dared not believe. The man's face was a blank as he led Vance from the room.

CHAPTER IV

The Red Bungalow

DINNER that afternoon went off well enough. Udine—her last name was Griffith, she said—made no secret of her interest in Vance.

"You're the first person aside from

Sojr and Mr. Corcoran that I've seen for seven years," she explained.

"You mean you've been on this island seven years?" Vance was pretending successfully to be an excitable young man vastly interested in a pretty girl. Amiably he chatted with her.

"Seven years," she nodded. "I was eleven when mother died, and we came here at once. Didn't we, Sojr?"

EL FALAKY obviously didn't like the trend of the conversation. He nodded, however, and said: "Your sainted mother would have loved this island."

Udine was as naïve as a child of ten; and Vance talked of general things with her. Though he wanted to question her, this was not the place. So he was overjoyed when, after dinner, she suggested a stroll outside.

El Falaky opened his mouth as if to protest, and Corcoran's face was blacker than a thunder cloud. But they made no objection, and this proved to Vance a point he had decided earlier in the day. Namely, that this girl was not privy to what went on in the bungalow. And these two were making strenuous efforts to prevent her from learning.

Out of earshot of the house, Vance turned his mind to the mystery of this place.

"It seems strange that you should be spending seven years here, with the great world dead to you."

"Strange?" she repeated. "It's not strange. Sojr's work is so much more important. He is a great patriot!"

"Indeed," remarked Vance non-committally. "And he is your father?"

"Gracious, no," she laughed. "Mr. Corcoran always calls him that because he was married to my step-mother. It was her second marriage," she explained. "I'm the daughter of Colonel Griffith of the Punjab Rifles;

after he died El Falaky, who was always a friend of ours, took such good care of us that my step-mother married him. He works now for the British."

She spoke innocently enough, but Vance sensed drama beneath. The widow of a colonel of British troops does not marry a native, no matter his friendliness.

HE rather surmised that the step-mother had fallen victim to El Falaky's hypnotic eyes no less than the daughter. Vance's curiosity as to the man's actual work grew. He was beginning to have a dreadful suspicion of what it might be; and already his mind was beginning to turn to methods of escape.

He would have need of that radio presently.

He was about to ask her where Corcoran fitted into the scheme of things when he suddenly heard the crackle of grass behind him.

"I think," he said loudly, "that if I can get your father to give me a guide, I'll go down and get some change of clothing."

"I know every inch of the shore down there," she replied gaily. "May I not qualify as a guide?"

"With pleasure," assented Vance. Casually he swung, and saw El Falaky standing not ten feet away. "Ah," said Vance coolly. "I was just going to find you. I believe I'll need some clothes, and Miss Udine has offered to guide me."

"Impossible," decided the man calmly. "In the first place, I can send a servant in the morning. And tonight the tunnel is closed. We close it at night—in case of trouble, you understand. Wandering Dyaks or the like."

Vance nodded. A lie, of course; there were no Dyaks. He was a prisoner. For how long?

He forced a smile. "So long as

I get them tomorrow, it doesn't matter."

"You were outrageously swindled," said El Falaky, conversationally. Walking between them, he guided them toward the bungalow. "That man Johnson was a crook of the first water. I understand he is dead now, and no others will be cheated."

"I hope not," sighed Vance. "All my life savings are tied up in that bungalow and jungle."

"Why not take our bungalow?" cried Udine eagerly. "We're leaving here about the twentieth. Sojr has to—"

"We can discuss that later when we know Mr. Vance better, White Dove," said El Falaky.

They reached the bungalow, cheerfully lit by several kerosene lamps. Corcoran was not to be seen, but a couple of Malays glided silently about. Sojr El Falaky and Udine bade Vance good-night.

HE was led by a Malay servant to his bedroom, a large airy place in one of the several additions to the bungalow. For a half hour he lay awake, wide-eyed, listening. It was nearly three-quarters of an hour, however, before he heard a faint slap-slap as of bared feet walking away. He nodded; he had known they would watch him.

Silently then he got out of bed. A stillness was over the house, a brooding quiet that seemed charged with evil. He put on his shirt, socks and trousers. Silently, he opened the door. He heard no sound. He tiptoed softly out of the room.

In the hallway all was dark and quiet. His objective was what he called El Falaky's throne-room, for he had certain ideas about the magic death, and a careful investigation might prove fruitful. He moved to the left.

He was in the left wing of the

house, halfway to the room when an oblong of saffron light brought him to a quick halt. Abruptly El Falaky emerged into the hall, closing the door after him. Vance's heart pounded. Had El Falaky seen him? But the man turned toward the living room, where, a moment later a lamp glowed.

A sudden fierce anger gripped Vance. El Falaky seemed suddenly an evil beast, revealed in all his malignity. What deviltry was he up to now?

ON a sudden the droning sound Vance had first heard in the tunnel cut through the sharp silence. The whine was not so loud here, but it permeated the night. Vance listened intently for a moment, then nodded in affirmation of a secret thought. Cautiously, hugging the wall, he made his way toward the living room.

He was standing near the library entrance when Corcoran came in through the other door.

Sojr El Falaky sat in the red lacquer chair, arms folded; he stared at Corcoran without speaking. The latter sat down, fished for a cigarette and lit it.

"The ship will come day after tomorrow," he offered. "What are you going to do about this Vance?"

"Leave him here," replied El Falaky. "Nothing must happen to him until Udine is aboard the ship. She must not lose faith in me."

Corcoran frowned. "So long as he's dead when we leave, I don't care. But we mustn't gum the game now."

"How many times must I tell you that I am in command?" El Falaky's voice contained a calm arrogance. "It is my will, to be obeyed. He can be left to me."

Vance, watching Corcoran, saw the small eyes narrow, the mouth tighten;

but a second later a jovial smile returned.

"Of course, sure, Chief. But after we've started I don't see how you can keep her in ignorance. She can't be hypnotized permanently. That's why her mother killed herself—when she found out what she'd done."

"Corcoran, you prod too much into my affairs." El Falaky resembled a coiled black cobra. "I took you into this because you have the American ability to organize. But there you must stop."

"Sure," Corcoran shrugged. "Only I've seen big things go to pot over a woman—a girl—and I'd hate to see you flop here." He fell silent for a moment. Then: "Is all the money where it's instantly available?"

"Yes."

"Twelve million pounds sterling," murmured Corcoran, regarding the end of his cigarette. "That's almost sixty million American dollars. A lot to accumulate in seven years, Sojr. That last batch of pearls and rubies must be here."

"NO," replied El Falaky, "I shipped them to Amsterdam; the drafts will come back on Barclay's at Singapore. The money will be there when we arrive in Singapore next week."

"I see," Corcoran scrubbed out the butt and rose. "Well, I'll turn in." He raised his hand to his brow. "In the cause, comrade. Good-night."

El Falaky's head went back; his flashing eyes glowed as if fire were in them. His hand came up. "In the cause, comrade. Good-night."

In his brilliant eyes was the look of a fanatic; his whole body seemed to emanate an energy, a tremendous enthusiasm held in check by his will alone. Corcoran went out and El Falaky lit one of his long cigarettes. The smoke, drifting into the hall, reached Vance's nostrils and his lips

tightened. That pungent odor was hashish. Once again the man seemed a strange eastern god. He sat there minutes, as immovable as a bronze statue.

Presently he got up and took hold of the molding on a panel in the wall. An orifice opened and he went within. He came out almost at once, but the droning sound had stopped. Then he blew out the kerosene lamp and Vance heard his footsteps retreating toward his chambers.

Silence came again over the red bungalow.

Ten minutes later Vance stole from the house and wormed his way through the dank, dew-laden vegetation. He reached the shaft entrance. There was no guard. But there was no need of one. To his consternation, Vance found a heavy steel gate across the shaft entrance, its sides countersunk in solid rock. Thick chains held by deeply driven staples and a heavy modern lock made the barrier impregnable.

Vance's single avenue of escape was closed.

CHAPTER V

A Bid for Freedom

THE next morning at breakfast Vance and Udine Griffith were alone. During the night Vance had weighed the situation carefully and had reached one conclusion—he would have to have the girl's aid.

So, now, finding her naïve gaze on him with unconcealed interest, he decided to gamble all on the single chance.

However, before he had a chance to speak, Corcoran thrust his tremendous bulk into the breakfast room and El Falaky came a moment later.

Vance crushed out the coal of his cigarette.

"I wonder," he suggested, "if you'd care to show me your garden?"

The girl nodded. "Gladly. Let us go now."

As they arose, Vance felt El Falaky's eyes on him, and Corcoran's too. But he avoided returning the glances and carelessly sauntered out the door and so across to the west side of the crater. Here Udine Griffith had her flower garden. But Vance was not interested in marigolds.

A quick look around showed them to be alone, in a cleared spot where none could approach without being seen.

HE stared at her, weighing her character, deciding on this one irrevocable step. There was no other way.

"I wonder," he asked abruptly, "if I can place my life in your hands?"

Her genuine puzzlement definitely convinced him she was no party to the scheme formulated in El Falaky's brain. "What do you mean?" she asked fearfully, as he made no effort to continue.

"El Falaky intends to murder me." Vance laid his cards down, without further parley. "El Falaky knows," he snapped, "that I am aware of the spell he puts on you. He intends to marry you. He suspects I know who he is, and will kill me to prevent my interfering with his plans."

"What!" Her balled fist pressed against her teeth. "He wouldn't. He—"

"He will. Listen." Vance came close, clutched her arm. "El Falaky does not work for the British raj. He has lied to you. He is known throughout the East as the Liberator. He works for the yellow race, the brown race. He is the relentless enemy of white domination. He has, with Corcoran, erected a thieves' organization and stolen twelve million

pounds worth of loot to finance revolts.

"There will be war in Cambodia, in China, in India—everywhere that the white nations hold colonies. When he leaves with you in two days, he goes to launch that world revolt. Thousands upon thousands of people will die—butchered—unless warning of his purpose can be sent out. That's why I want—must have—your help."

HER face had drained of all color. "He told me," she muttered, "he was for peace."

"He lied. He will kill me, as he killed four white men at the bungalow on the porch. He is mad. Right now he is disposing of part of the loot stolen from the Rajah of Curjapore and will get the money in Singapore. I must get away and give warning, and you must help me."

"How can you give warning?" the girl asked. She was trembling, stunned by his revelation.

Once again Vance gambled the stake on a single throw. "At the beach bungalow I've got a wireless sending set. Within a few hundred miles of here are regular British destroyer patrols. The *Hampton* is the closest. Under forced draft it can reach here within sixteen hours—possibly twelve."

Her face was bleached.

Pretending to point to some yellow roses, Vance took her arm, squeezed it tightly.

"He has been hypnotizing you," he muttered. "You must resist that spell. You must fight it off with your will. Tonight you must get me a key to the gate across the shaft and we'll go to the beach bungalow. I've weapons there and we can hold out until the destroyer comes." She said nothing. Vance asked: "Do you know where the key is kept?"

"There are only two. El Falaky has one, Corcoran the other."

"And you can get it?"

She turned and regarded him squarely, dull horror in the depths of her eyes. "I'll get it," she promised. "And—oh, you must take me away from here. I can't stand—to—to—think of him—"

The appearance of El Falaky prevented further conversation.

He stared quickly at both their faces, and Vance feared that in the girl's the man might find suspicion of the truth. But if he did so, El Falaky made no comment. He accompanied them back to the bungalow, discoursing on flowers with courteous ease. But as soon as the veranda was reached he quickly took Udine Griffith away and, returning, said to Vance, "You'll find your clothing in your room, Mr. Vance."

Vance followed the man to his room, and as he entered and saw his baggage piled neatly on teakwood rests, a sudden tremor attacked his heart. El Falaky had stripped the beach bungalow. Had he then discovered the wireless set? By no intimation did the *Liberator* indicate that he had. But Vance perceived his rifles and small arms were not included in the shift. El Falaky had, then, seized those.

HERE was another complication. Of what use was the beach bungalow now, if there were no weapons there with which to defend it?

The tall Hindu withdrew and Vance pretended to busy himself with laying out his things. But his brain was busy. If El Falaky had smashed the wireless, robbed him of his weapons, then he had rendered Vance absolutely helpless. More than ever, now, Vance must place his reliance on the girl.

During the day he twice tried to

get her alone and explain the absolute necessity of weapons, but each time, before he could speak, El Falaky's sudden appearance startled them into silence. Afternoon and siesta came, and Vance's nonchalant strolling revealed to him six Malays busily engaged in packing. Vance thought of the *prau* that had gone south on the lagoon. There was, quite evidently, a landing place down there, and it would be in that *prau* that El Falaky would depart.

DURING the afternoon the Malays made frequent trips, heavily loaded, through the shaft. Vance remained close to the bungalow, and tried not to get too far from Udine Griffith's side. In his own apparently careless wanderings within the house he tried to locate weapons, but he found none. He felt closely caught within the jaws of a steel trap.

It was after dinner that evening that Vance's opportunity came. He stood smoking a cigarette on the path leading down from the veranda when Udine Griffith deliberately left the others within and joined him.

"Pretend to be admiring the sky," whispered Vance, "and then tell me where the weapons—guns—are kept."

"In El Falaky's chamber," she replied. "The key to the shaft gate is in the same place—in a box on the chifferobe. What do you plan?"

"Leave tonight," he replied succinctly. "Tomorrow will be too late."

Rapidly he reflected on the situation.

El Falaky's room was at the far end of the bungalow. To invade it was risking instant discovery. Yet it offered the only possibility.

He stretched out his arms as if pointing to Venus, glowing like a pulsing heart in the blue-black sky. "Pretend to want El Falaky's company," he said softly. "Get him out

of the house for fifteen minutes. Then go to your room and stay there for a half hour. Come out and walk down the path toward the pond. I'll meet you there."

"I'm afraid—he—might—you understand—"

Vance did. He quickly cut in. "You must steel your mind against his power," he whispered. "He cannot make you do what you will not do."

She acquiesced with a nod of the head. Both of them strolled casually back to the veranda. Vance made an excuse and went to his room.

He shrank back silently as he saw the huge body of Corcoran going along the hallway. The man entered his own room. Vance waited a moment and then, silently hoping Corcoran stayed there, stole past the door and into El Falaky's room.

It was dark in there, and he had to grope blindly. But presently, on the chifferobe, his anxious fingers discovered a small rosewood box. Reaching within he encountered cold metal—a key. He searched in the chifferobe top and possessed himself of two guns, a Webley six-gun, probably his own, he decided, and a Luger eight-shot automatic. A press of the clip button showed him it was fully loaded. So was the Webley.

THE two heavy guns gave him a sense of comfort as he tip-toed back to the hallway. At least, he thought, he now could put up a fight for his life. He was halfway on the return trip when the door to Corcoran's room opened. Vance froze. There was no time to hide; all he could do was to flatten himself against the wall and hope Corcoran went the other way.

He listened for Corcoran's footsteps. At first he heard nothing; then, presently, he heard the man stealthily moving along, hugging the

opposite wall. What could he be up to? Vance waited for a full three minutes without moving. And, looking down the hallway, he was astonished to see Corcoran faintly silhouetted against the opened door of El Falaky's room. He vanished within; the door clicked after him.

Vance did not stop to ponder this puzzling action. He took advantage of the opportunity and hastened to the veranda.

Here he paused a moment to locate El Falaky. He saw the coal of the Hindu's cigar glowing out there in the darkness.

Udine Griffith was keeping him occupied. Vance decided he had a moment or two when he would be undisturbed; and on the impulse he turned quickly and retraced his steps to the living room. A kerosene lamp, turned low, illuminated the room.

By its radiance Vance stole to the wall where he had seen El Falaky pressing the molding. His own fingers moved sensitively up and down and presently he suppressed an exclamation of satisfaction when the hidden panel slid silently open. Vance vanished within, and remained possibly a moment.

WHEN he came out he possessed the secret of El Falaky's magic death.

More, he had decided how this magic death mystery could be turned to his own advantage in the desperate adventure which was now to come.

When El Falaky and Udine Griffith came back up the path to the veranda, they found Vance seated in a wicker chair, calmly consuming a cigarette.

"You are up late," said El Falaky courteously.

"The night is beautiful."

"We retire early in this house," said El Falaky. "Perhaps—"

"I always obey the host's wishes," cut in Vance, chuckling.

He stood up and followed El Falaky into the house. Beside him was Udine Griffith. He touched her arm, pressed it warningly. She dropped behind.

Vance chanced El Falaky's opportunity of turning and surprising him and leaned close.

"The gate—five minutes," Vance mouthed into her ear.

HER hand touched his significantly, and then with loud good-nights they separated. But Vance did not go to his room. He dawdled until he saw El Falaky go into the living room, then he turned swiftly and darted out to the veranda, down the path and so toward the shaft entrance.

He had been standing there a minute or so, cloaked in the shadows of the stone entrance, when Udine Griffith flitted down the path, like a white ghost.

"You have the key?" Her voice, despite her attempts to be calm, was shaky.

"Yes," he took her hand and they glided noiselessly to the barred entrance. Quickly Vance inserted the key and it whined slightly in the lock. A slight grating noise followed the opening of the iron door. Vance thrust Udine Griffith through. A sudden exaltation gripped him as he saw freedom ahead. He had thrust his head into the noose and was taking it out.

He was about to stoop through himself and lock the gate behind him when there came a stentorian shout from the bungalow.

Lights flickered suddenly. A shot rang out.

Then another blasted the silence. There came to Vance's ears the thud of running feet.

Desperate feet racing with every

atom of power. Footsteps racing toward Vance.

CHAPTER VI

In the Shaft

VANCE did not understand the reason for this sudden alarm. But the rapid pound of footsteps toward the shaft told him his escape was jeopardized. Swiftly he yanked the gate shut. A click, and the heavy padlock snapped home. He pulled back into the blackness of the shaft. Gazing out into the lighter darkness he saw Corcoran draw to a panting halt. Behind him came El Falaky. "I believe you lie," gasped El Falaky. "You did not see him. You took those jewels."

"You're crazy!" yelled Corcoran. "It was Vance. He's a spy. He stole the jewels. I saw him running, and fired at him."

"He couldn't get through here," El Falaky pounded the lock. "The door is locked. He couldn't."

"The girl!" snapped Corcoran. "She gave him the key. Maybe she went with him. Where is she?"

That much Vance heard as he raced along the black shaft. It was enough to tell him the reason why Corcoran had entered El Falaky's room. El Falaky had lied; he had not shipped the jewels to Amsterdam. Instead, they had been in his room. Corcoran had stolen them and, caught probably trying to get away, was trying to shift the blame.

Out of this, one fact rose starkly. El Falaky had caught the trail too soon. It would be a fight now and a desperate one.

Vance held tightly to Udine Griffith's arm and hurried her along the shaft. They plunged into a wall, fell into holes. They ran without speech, because they had no breath to spare. They came to the falls, and plunged through the screen of water. Here

Vance began to use his slim supply of matches until he had found the trail.

His brain schemed rapidly, as they ran along the sand toward the beach bungalow.

What chance of defending the building had he? For defend it he must, until help arrived. The odds were enormous, two against eight.

"Can you shoot?" he asked Udine.

"Fairly well," she replied.

"You'll need to be better than that," he muttered.

Suspense gripped him as they raced up the porch of the bungalow. Had the small radio broadcasting outfit been found and destroyed? Upon that hinged both their lives. He wished now for his Cordite rifle; revolvers meant close action. But he had no recourse except to play the cards as they fell.

Within the house Vance paused for a moment to listen. He heard nothing to indicate close pursuit. He judged that he had five, possibly ten minutes to spare.

He thrust the Luger automatic into the girl's hand. "Watch this door," he commanded. "Fire at any movement. Be careful of the gun; it's a filed trigger and it works at slight pressure."

He turned and darted swiftly to the small bedroom where he had concealed the radio. A flaring match showed him that the ground sheet was apparently undisturbed. Lifting it, he saw the instrument.

"Man!" he muttered. "It's the one chance."

HE thrust home the knife switch and opened the key. A spark leaped in the crystal. The radio worked. A second more and his fingers pounded out the urgent call: "SOS, SOS—HSS—HSS," the special *Hampton* call. He had no way of knowing whether it was received,

but Petry had said a listener would be waiting all the time. So he put through the call five times, at three second intervals, and then raced into the message:

"COME QUICKLY BJAR BARU
—EAST SHORE—NOTIFY PETRY
WATCH OUT REVOLT IN
SHANGHAI CALCUTTA BOM-
BAY SAIGON—LIBERATOR
FOUND HERE."

Twice he pounded out the message. At the end of the second repeat he added grimly: "BESIEGED AND OUTNUMBERED PLEASE HURRY."

He pulled the switch, picked up some small tools from the radio and returned to the girl. "Any noise?" he asked.

SHE looked up at him, frightened. "No noise. That's why I'm afraid. They can come without noise."

"Hold on another moment," he counseled cheerfully. "The message is through. Right now the *Hampton* is making forty miles an hour toward us."

He strode into the kitchen; but at the door he hesitated, and conducted himself thereafter with extreme caution. Carefully he went to work with his tools. Finally, he looked to the screen, and the screened door. Tight.

"Good," he nodded. "Don't try to come in this way, El Falaky."

A moment later and he was relieving Udine at the door. He took a position that gave him a sweep of three sides. He told her to watch the fourth.

"But what about the rear entrance," she asked, looking back. "Can't they—?"

"Not if El Falaky's magic death is working well," replied Vance grimly. "And I think it is."

He had made a search of his rifle cases, but, as he had expected, they were empty. Ten minutes passed in silence. He wondered at the reason for this delay in attack. "Funny," he muttered to the girl. "They were at the gate. Corcoran had a key."

"I am afraid," she murmured in a small voice. "He is a dreadful man."

Another five minutes passed. And then suddenly Vance thought he saw a stirring in the bougainvillea bushes.

Vance took a last look around his position. He controlled the four approaches to the front entrance. He had two guns and ammunition. Only two men at a time could crowd through the door, and Vance was enough of a shot to think he could stop them. The real danger lay in being taken from behind, and here he depended upon Falaky's magic death.

He raised the Webley. He took careful aim, then smashed a slug through the bougainvillea two feet to the right of where the movement had been. There came a yell, not one of pain, but of fright. Vance grinned. "More careful, next time," he muttered.

Rifles suddenly started to crack, and slugs hammered their way through the flimsy walls of the bungalow. But none of them came near the two defenders.

AND then, suddenly, there was no more firing, and Vance heard El Falaky's voice cursing.

A moment or so afterward, it cried aloud: "*Sahib Vance! Sahib Vance!*"

Vance debated answering, for his voice might offer a target for the rifles. Again came the call, persistent.

"What does the Liberator want?" he finally asked.

The knowledge that Vance had

recognized him must have shocked El Falaky, for there was no reply for a full minute.

When his voice came, it was surcharged with rage.

"It is unfortunate you said that, *Sahib* Vance. I cannot spare your life. But I do not wish my men to attack while Udine is there. Release her, let her come to me, and I promise you an easy death. Refuse and you'll be staked to an anthill."

Vance's reply was unhesitating. "She belongs here. Try and get her."

Again silence. Then: "So be it, *Sahib*. I shall come and take you both."

A SECOND later two rifles split the silence with roars and two slugs came dangerously near Vance's head. He crouched down, Udine beside him as they peered out to watch for the attack. It did not come at the moment because of a diversion.

There was a heavy crashing in the jungle to the left. At the same time a voice cried out in Malaysian: "*Tuan* Corcoran escaped, *Tuan*, and he has come toward this bungalow."

El Falaky cursed aloud, bitterly. Vance grinned. He was not surprised shortly after the interruption when a low voice called to him from the rear, near the kitchen.

"Vance," it said, "let me in. I got a gat. We'll fight it out together." Corcoran's voice barely carried to Vance.

The latter shook his head. "Play your own hand, Corcoran. I'm playing this alone."

The man swore, but Vance noticed he did not try to invade the bungalow kitchen and grinned. Corcoran evidently knew about the magic death.

When the attack did come, it was entirely frontal. Five Malays came out of the bougainvillea, racing like the wind, waving ribbon-like krisses.

As they galloped to the veranda two rifles began to pump slugs at the door, as swiftly as the owners could pull the trigger.

The covering fire did well enough. Vance dared not raise himself to reply. He waited until the foremost two Malays pounded up the stairs, yelling shrilly. The rifle fire had to cease now lest the Malays be hit. Resting the Webley muzzle on his left wrist, Vance took careful aim. Three explosions roared; three jets of saffron came from the Webley. One Malay fell as if struck by a thunderbolt, the other gave a dismal yell, wheeled and fell backward off the steps. The other three, seeing what had happened, screamed in fright, turned and raced back the way they had come.

Vance chuckled. "He won't try that again."

Nonetheless he was worried about the steady rifle fire, and thrust Udine behind a flimsy shelter built of his bags. Then, as he had expected, while the rifle fire continued sporadically from the front, there came a movement and voices from the rear. El Falaky was going to try and take him front and rear simultaneously.

HE took a deep breath and his teeth clicked together.

"Now," he muttered, "we'll see if the magic death hunch is good." Quietly he waited.

Presently came El Falaky's voice in Malay—high, commanding, threatening. "I am the god of magic death, and I say you are charmed; none may hurt you. Go in and kill the white devil." He was talking to his men.

There followed a scream of pain, the thud of a struck blow and another cry.

Five more minutes of waiting. Suddenly came the patter of slap-

ping bare feet. Over the edge of the veranda, appeared the monkey-like face of a Malay. Vance ripped off three quick shots. The face vanished, and the owner did not re-appear.

Vance turned his gaze in time to see a Malay slash with a kris through the screen of the kitchen door, firing blindly with a revolver as he came.

BARELY had the man's bare feet crossed the threshold than he seemed to trip.

"*Tuan—mag—*" the yell died on his lips. He plunged headlong and slid for several feet like a baseball runner stealing a base. He did not move again, and those Malays who had followed—three of them, Vance saw—shrank back and quickly vanished from sight.

Vance heard El Falaky tongue-lashing them. The man seemed suddenly to have gone berserk—utterly mad. "Follow me," he screamed. "The god of magic death makes all powerless before him."

He came in sight, yelling. "The day of the downfall of the white race is here!"

He howled again, and as if this were the signal, Malays came out of the bougainvillea and charged the veranda. Vance, conserving ammunition, did not fire until they were within twenty yards. That gave them terrific impetus, and though he blazed away madly at their legs and stomachs, three reached the very door to hack at it with krisses.

One carried a six-gun and blasted fairly into Vance's face. A burning bit of iron ate into his left side. Then Udine Griffith's gun roared in his ear and the man who had shot him dropped, clutching at his belly. The other two, hacking away at the door, Vance was able to get in an instant.

A slug whining by from the rear

made him turn, heart leaping into his mouth. He saw a Malay with a rifle, firing through the rear door. He saw more. He saw El Falaky hacking away the screen with a kris.

Then the Hindu came in and behind him, but not close, came two more men. Vance's heart leaped; he had quelled the charge at the veranda, and the survivors were hanging back to see what El Falaky's rear guard action would accomplish. Did the Hindu know of some way to cross that threshold of death unhurt?

Sparks flew where steel met steel as the kris hacked a passage. Then without pausing the Hindu rushed across the doorway, yelling: "Down with the white race."

He was mad, in a frenzy. He stepped onto the floor. Udine Griffith gave a little moan. Vance watched, fascinated. He saw the Hindu's form jerk to its uttermost height, then the man went down.

The Malays let out a scream: "The god strikes!"

To Vance's amazement El Falaky wriggled forward. His face was contorted in agony, and his eyes blazed like searchlights.

"The god fails!" The words were wrenched from his lips by will alone.

HE came on, was through the kitchen now, half-way into the living room. The left hand, holding a Luger automatic, advanced in front of him. Vance could see the finger curling convulsively on the trigger, but the gun did not explode.

"Vishnu curse you!" came the man's words.

He reared halfway up, and then the gun clattered from his hand, the kris fell to the floor, and the strength went out of his body as the life went out of his soul. He crashed to the floor—dead.

A split second of utter silence fell. Then the Malays howled in terror

and their bodies could be heard crashing through the vegetation.

What had occurred had startled Vance as he had never been startled before. And now happened what he always called the miracle.

The bearded head on the floor raised a fraction of an inch. The dulled eyes looked blindly, as if seeking something. A voice came, strange, weird, inhuman: "White Dove, I love—" That was all, but Vance never forgot it.

VANCE sat cross-legged on the floor, keeping guard over the sleeping girl, when the marines and sailors of the destroyer *Hampton* came surging up the beach. The Americans encountered no resistance; the jungle seemed as dead as the unburied corpses that surrounded the bungalow.

After Udine had been carried to the small boat in a stretcher made of an overcoat slung between two rifles, the young lieutenant in charge listened to Vance's story.

When he had heard it through he shook his head in bewilderment. "But he had enough men to take you front and rear! What killed him at the door?"

"The magic death!" Vance replied.

And as the lieutenant stared he went on: "El Falaky had been here a long time—seven years. He had arranged, on that waterfall, a neat electric generator that gave him plenty of current. Because he had to keep the natives in subjection by pretended magic, he continued to use kerosene lamps, but he wired the rear of this house and the underground shaft with man-killing current.

"That's the way he killed the poor devils that preceded me. That's the way he killed my servant—electrocution.

"You'll find the sink wired with a steel plate on the floor beneath. When I left the red bungalow, I threw in the switch that galvanized the kitchen door."

He paused and gratefully lit the cigarette that the lieutenant had given him. "That part is simple. What will puzzle me all the days of my life is how El Falaky, with five thousand volts of juice in him, could crawl across that kitchen floor and almost reach the living room. He had been dead thirty seconds, but he talked, and crawled, and tried to shoot me.

"And after he's been stone dead a minute, he talks. Try and figure that one out."

"A miracle," muttered the lieutenant.

"Of will power," assented Vance. "I've heard of men running with a bullet in the heart—but electricity"—he shrugged.

THEY found Corcoran's body hacked to pieces, at the edge of the jungle, and on him were the jewels that had been stolen from India. At the hidden quai at the south end of the island was the *prau* on which El Falaky would have escaped. Its crew were taken prisoners.

The red bungalow was fired, the entrance to the crater blown up with a dynamite shot.

And that night the *Hampton* sailed away from the Island of Magic Death and put a period to Vance's greatest case.

Next Month: Don't Miss TRAILS OF TREACHERY, An Exciting Novelette of Marauding Indians, by Major George Fielding Elliot

Too Much Liberty



Snig Lewis' scrawny arm shot out and clutched Morgan just as he dropped

You'll Get A Kick out of this Rip-Roaring Yarn of a Tough Gob and a Quick-Witted Rookie

By SYL MacDOWELL

Author of "Gobs Can't Shoot," "Below the Line," etc.

"The engineers,
They have no fears,
They never balk at trifles;
They hang by their toes,
When the bugler blows,
And shoot at him with rifles!"

IRON MORGAN'S below-decks ditty rumbled like a man-o'-war blowing boilers as he swaggered across Brooklyn Navy Yard. Towards the Sands Street gate. To-

wards a rousing, roaring, hell-raising liberty.

Two long months since Morgan, machinist first class on the battleship *Texarkana*, just up from Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, had enjoyed a liberty. Two months' pay was burning a hole in his starboard midships pocket, as he reached the brink of No. 1 dry dock.

No. 1 dry dock was a yawning chasm, one hundred feet wide and

nearly as deep. Ordinarily, it was an impassable barrier. But the dry dock was empty now. A narrow monkey-bridge spanned it, to accommodate footbound traffic to and from the East River berths. The *Texarkana* lay alongside in one of those berths, her clean, gray sides contrasting sharply, and with due credit to Navy spotlessness, against the dim, smoky mass of Manhattan's towering sky-line.

STILL roaring his salty song, Morgan started across the monkey-bridge.

Under his two hundred pounds of black-gang beef, the planks sagged and creaked complainingly.

"The engineers,
They have no fears . . ."

"Iron" Morgan wasn't much on harmony, but his deep, bass voice had volume enough to drown out a ship's band. Midway across, however, his song subsided to a low, throaty growl. He halted. Unbelievably, he drew his thick hands out of his jacket pockets and plopped them decisively on the railing on each side of him.

He stared dead ahead, slightly pop-eyed.

And then a slow, crocodile grin widened his mail-slot mouth.

At the other end of the monkey-bridge, another bluejacket came, headed towards him. This other specimen was nothing like Iron Morgan. He looked like a slim destroyer bearing down on a broad-beamed battle-wagon.

He was struggling under the burden of a dunnage bag and hammock roll, which half-hid him. His sleeves were bare of rating or hash-marks. Across his skinny right shoulder, where the sleeve hem met his baggy, untailored blouse, was sewn the tell-

tale white strip of an apprentice seaman.

A rookie sailor! A rubber boot, reporting for his first shipboard duty!

Only a boot would be ignorant of the fact, the traditional, time-honored fact, that the first man to set foot on a gang-plank had right-of-way.

Iron Morgan waited until the burdened blunderer was close under his bows. Then he emitted a blast like a fog-siren.

"Gangway, shoal water! Make way for a sailor!"

So startled was the other that he nearly dropped his topheavy burden into the barnacled depths of the dry dock. He tottered, and the dunnage bag balanced precariously on the railing. He peered up at Morgan, from beneath colorless eyebrows. Except for its splattered freckles, his face was white. Not the respectable pallor of a hot engine room. It was a training station pallor.

He grinned placatingly.

"Sho, ah most ski-hooted ovah-board!" he returned mildly. "Reckon yo kin squeeze past, suh?"

He pressed his sardine-like frame aside to let the big bluejacket pass.

"I said gangway, ya pea-green swab-pusher! Ya hear?"

THE little apprentice wriggled, shifting himself free of his hammock roll, and squinted a measuring eye at the narrow passage room. Then at the looming bulk of Iron Morgan.

"This heah's a sho-nuff problem in navigation, hain't it, now? Where Ah come from," he suggested, "the team with the load has courtesy o' the road. Empties back up, suh."

Iron Morgan's lips bulged from high steam pressure within. His chest swelled and his coal-scoop hands lifted from the railing. He scooped out, seizing the other by the neckerchief.

"Call me a empty? Huh? Now

pipe down and reverse yer screw!" he bellowed. "Before I heave ya overside!"

The apprentice regarded Morgan's crumpling grasp on his neckerchief with displeasure. Then, without any warning, a scrawny, freckled fist shot suddenly out. It wasn't much of a punch, but it caught Morgan by surprise, right in the softest part of his rounded-out blouse front.

"Ooomph!" said Morgan, casting off and clutching his belly.

But he recovered his breath quickly. His face was red as boot-topping as he howled:

"W-why, ya damn little turnip-puller! I'm gonna learn ya sumthin' that ain't in the bluejacket's bible, ya—!"

HE whacked out lustily. But "Snig" Lewis was as elusive as the piney squirrel of his native Kentucky hills. He ducked. And as Morgan swung at him again, he scrambled over the railing. In the next instant, he was perched out on a cross-brace.

Iron Morgan mumbled and violently flung a thick thigh over the railing in pursuit.

"Where Ah come from—" began Snig Lewis.

"I don't know where ya come from, ya pie-faced monkey!" boomed Morgan, "but I sure as heck know where yer gonna drop to!"

He kicked at Snig Lewis' freckled nose. But Snig managed to be just out of range. Mooring himself uncertainly to the railing with one hand, Iron Morgan sent his No. 11 whizzing out again.

He kicked just seven-eighths of an inch too far. His stubby fingers tore loose from the railing. He clawed for support. He tottered and gave a whoop of terror.

For a fraction of a second it looked like Iron Morgan was going to spend

his liberty, a longer liberty than he expected, in the Navy Yard Hospital. But Snig Lewis' scrawny arm shot out again, and he clutched Morgan's jacket collar just as he dropped. It nearly tore Snig loose from his perch on the cross-brace, but the act arrested the big bluejacket's plunge enough to allow him to flip a frantic leg over the railing.

His smartly-stitched white hat sailed into the abyss, down towards the slimy bottom of the dry dock. His jacket collar flopped over his head. From under its smothering folds came desperate, muffled cries, as Iron Morgan suspended by one leg, upside down.

"Hey, I'm slippin'! Help!"

Snig Lewis skittered back onto the monkey-bridge. He grabbed Iron Morgan's ankle and gave a well-meaning yank.

"Ow!" shrieked Morgan.

FRESHENING the nip on Morgan's shin, Snig set himself for another heroic heave when somebody suddenly appeared at his side. There was an astonished gasp, then a hand joined his own.

The sleeve above the hand, Snig became aware, was adorned with a broad gold stripe and narrow, bright band.

Even had he turned his head, Snig would not yet have been able to recognize that the broad-striper was none other than Henry Howell O'Houlihan, commander-in-chief of the United States Fleet. The big boss of Uncle Sam's forces afloat!

But Snig recognized admiral's stripes. And that was enough. He knew what to do when an admiral was around. He cast off from Morgan's leg, saluted, and stood smartly at attention.

This brought renewed howls from Morgan. Admiral O'Houlihan, instead of answering Snig's salute,

dropped the heavy handbag he was carrying and laid hold of Morgan's leg with both hands.

Perhaps no other emergency could possibly have caused Admiral O'Houlihan to release his grasp for one instant on that precious hand-bag, which he was carrying from his flagship, the *Texarkana*, to the taxicab stand at the Sands Street gate. He had gripped it like a treasure of gold and jewels.

DRIPPED recklessly, the handbag struck the planks with a sickening crunch. The planks right away turned moist. A small pool appeared around the bottom of the bag and widened ominously. Then a thin, golden stream of rum—choice Cuban rum—trickled over the edge of the monkey-bridge, over Iron Morgan's dangling, inverted form.

Came another agonized yelp from Morgan.

"Hey, ya half-witted cockroach! Yer bustin' my leg!"

"Bear a hand!" ordered Admiral O'Houlihan. "Lively!"

Together, admiral and rubber boot hauled hard. Iron Morgan was fetched up over the rail. Admiral O'Houlihan was blowing as though he had taken in a spritsail sheet in a gale. Morgan, recognizing the admiral, fell back helplessly. His stern overhang plopped into the rum puddle.

Admiral O'Houlihan, who had not yet perceived the misfortune that had befallen the hand-bag, speared Snig and Morgan each with a frosty blue eye. He was dead set against liberties, anyhow.

"What is this, a confounded circus?" he demanded crisply. "My socks and stars! What do you men think this is? A trapeze?"

Morgan simply gazed. A lord of language in ordinary circumstances—bad language—he was speechless now.

Snig thought fast. It was up to

him to answer. And if he was ever going to amount to anything on the deck-force, he had to give the right answer now.

An inspiration flashed into his brain.

"Why, suh!" he spoke up, "this heah friend o' mine, he let on as how he could hang by his toes! By his toes. Yessuh!"

In this tragic instant, Admiral O'Houlihan beheld the wet planks, the flowing rum, with Iron Morgan seated in the middle of it.

A groan escaped him. He forgot what he was going to do to the two sailors. He lifted the bag tenderly, clambered over Morgan, and rushed towards the taxicab stand, where he could find the necessary seclusion in which to calculate his losses and mourn over them.

This unexpected deliverance left Snig and Iron Morgan facing one another, and the latter was not in a merry mood. What might have ensued would have given the pharmacist's mate on duty at the Navy Yard Hospital a nasty little job after all, had not Morgan's wide smear of a nose suddenly detected a vaguely familiar and exceedingly attractive odor.

He sniffed. He dabbed his wet blues with his finger-tips. He hoisted a leg and smelled at a wet streak that extended from pockets to socks.

He took a deep inhale, and the savage expression faded from his face.

"Ah-hhh!" he said.

THE powerful aroma of Bacardi 1873 revived him sufficiently to get to his feet. He did not know how his person had come to be so deliciously drenched, but the smell reminded him of the liberty before him.

And of his intention to saturate his condensers to make up for two dry, dry months on shipboard.

But he delayed long enough to

glower at Snig and utter a parting threat.

"Don't ever let me cross yer wake again, ya damn little spider monkey," he said. "If ya do, I'll sock ya so hard yer ears'll stick out like windscoops!"

Snig Lewis properly decided that he had run afoul of enough heavy weather for one day. He didn't want his ears to stick out like windscoops, and he didn't want to get court-martialed out of the Navy before he got into it.

So he was prudently silent. He re-shouldered his load, and scuttled across the monkey-bridge, to report without further delay to his ship.

His ship, of course, was Admiral O'Houlihan's. And Iron Morgan's. The flagship *Texarkana*.

SNIG found that his division officer was a kindly lieutenant. The battleship was shoving off at midnight for the West Coast. Every bluejacket in the crew, excepting a skeleton watch and a work party loading stores, was enjoying a farewell liberty in New York.

So the division officer, Lieutenant Varney, handed Snig a liberty ticket and ordered him to report back on board at ten p. m. Snig left the ship, crossed Dry Dock No. 1 again, and emerged from the Sands Street gate.

Never before in his nineteen years had Snig Lewis been out of Kentucky, save during his brief sojourn at the naval training station at Newport. Consequently, the distant skyscrapers of New York were strange and vastly impressive to his wondering eyes. He flagged a passing street car, got off at Brooklyn Bridge, and following the crowd into the subway, he wound up not long after at the spot where seafarers inevitably are drawn.

Battery Park.

He sat on a park bench and gazed

in awe at the majestic heights of lower Manhattan, a-flutter with curious little plumes of steam like commission pennants. He was enchanted by the spectacle, but preferred to take no chances on missing his ship by straying into the canyon-like streets and getting lost.

He had heard of folks getting lost in the big city. Moreover, he might encounter that bloodthirsty, toe-hanging Iron Morgan.

So when he saw an excursion boat about to depart from the Battery wall for the Statute of Liberty, he paused to take on stores of peanuts, pink popcorn balls and candy at a refreshment stand, bought a ticket, and went on board.

Snig Lewis had no way of knowing that as the excursion boat tooted her whistle, cast off, and threaded a course through the busy harbor, he was being carried into exactly the danger that he was most particularly anxious to avoid.

HE did not know that Iron Morgan, very shortly after embarking from the Sands Street gate, had made the unhappy discovery that most of his two months' pay had spilled from his pockets whilst he was suspended over Dry Dock No. 1. Morgan might have returned to search for his losses. But the memory of that deep pit, with its bottom of broken barnacle scrapings, made him shudder. Iron Morgan had the engineer's dread of high places.

Nor did Snig Lewis know that Iron Morgan, on counting his remaining capital, found that he had left on his person just enough for one quart of Manhattan's ambrosial liquor output, together with the means to go to some economical place to consume it.

But when Snig ascended the zigzag iron stairs inside the Statue of Liberty, and reached the topmost

landing, his eyes fell on a suit of Navy blues that was altogether too familiar.

It was the toe-hanging gentleman of recent acquaintance. Iron Morgan had chosen, for a quiet rendezvous to imbibe, the place where liberty ought to have been the most abundant. The coppery interior of the Goddess of Liberty.

It was also plain that Morgan himself should have had a coppery interior before attempting to slake his sea-going thirst on Battery Park whisky. He was asleep on the iron grating, where visitors ascend to peek from the eyeports in the statue's torch arm. He was snoring loudly.

SNIIG had intended to enjoy this panoramic view of New York harbor, but now he suddenly changed his mind. He turned and began to tip-toe down the zig-zag stairs.

But the cruel Fate that had drawn them together, out of the million and one places that a sailor might go in New York, added now another dirty dig. Iron Morgan, slumbering heavily, was visited by a bad dream. Probably a dream that he was hanging by his toes on the edge of a precipice, and that a lion was gnawing at his leg.

He grunted, muttered, and stirred. And then he woke up.

He felt bad. His head ached. Memory of the stuff he had bought and drunk sickened him. It certainly didn't compare with the mellow perfume that still saturated his best blues. The Battery Park stuff tasted more like boiler compound.

He sat up, and his eyes sought some outlet for his ugly mood. He heard the cautious step on the stairs below. He looked down, then rubbed his eyes. He shook his head, hauled himself uncertainly to his feet, and looked again.

Sure enough! There was the runt of a rookie that had been the cause of all his trouble!

His fists doubled into togglehead knots, his chest swelled, and he emitted a walrus-like roar:

"Belay there, boot!"

Snig halted unhappily, as Morgan started down the stairs in pursuit of him. A pain romped around inside the big sailor's thick skull as he emitted another roar that made the first one seem like the gentle swish of tropic surf on coral strands.

"Hey, ya spindle-legged little pumpkin-roller! Ya rat-eyed minnow! Ya dirty little squirt o' green bilge! I told ya—!"

He charged down on Snig, who looked about him desperately, then turned and heaved an unfinished popcorn ball into his oncoming enemy's face.

The popcorn ball crashed like a fragmentation shell. Iron Morgan paused to claw the sticky kernels from his face, then sputtering another salvo of blood-curdling threats, he charged on.

Snig rounded a landing, then leaped nimbly onto the slick, metal railing and slid to the land below. But Iron Morgan's feet were accustomed to ladder rungs. He clattered down in pursuit.

"I gotcha now!" he bellowed.

REACHING Snig, he swung a crushing fist.

Snig relied again on his squirrel-like ability to be some place else at the critical instant that Morgan's bunch of fives whizzed past his ear. The force of the blow carried Morgan half around. He lost his uncertain footing and sat down with a thump.

Snig leaped over him and ran up the stairs. Morgan arose and pursued. But he was never quite fast enough to catch up with the little

rookie. Snig seemed to be everywhere at once. On the stairs one moment, on the railing the next, sometimes under them, but never in reach of the menacing fists.

The chase presently began to tell on Morgan's condition. He was not built for speed anyhow. His roars became less and less violent, until they were reduced to a gurgling gasp.

Finally he flopped on the stairs—panting, sweating—and wishing that he had a boathook to aid him in bringing his prey within fistic range.

AS he paused, with Snig roosting above him, munching popcorn, the glow of the later afternoon sun stole through the eyeports above, casting a cathedral-like radiance through the shadowy interior of the statue. For it was growing close onto five o'clock. And, unbeknownst to either Morgan or Snig Vance, the excursion boat, at the landing far below, was about to shove off on her last return trip of the day for the Battery.

This reminder came to them when the call of a watchman sounded down in the base of the statue.

"All out?" came the shout.

Snig felt that something was about to go wrong again. For the first time during his seige, he spoke.

"Reckon we might go down and talk this heah ovah outside?" he suggested plaintively.

"No!" roared Morgan. "When I'm finished with ya, there won't be nuthin' left to talk over!"

The warning toot of the excursion boat floated up to them. Morgan mopped his beaded brow. Snig lapsed into meditative silence and switched from popcorn to peanuts.

And then a door banged shut down below. Down in the base of the statue.

The excursion boat gave a double

toot. Morgan knew that two toots meant shoving off.

"Say!" he sputtered. A gradual dismay was spreading over his warm countenance. "Say, wot the—!"

He got up and galloped up the stairs. But not in pursuit of his bantam-sized prey this time. He ignored Snig entirely. He ascended to the eyeports. One look was enough.

The excursion boat was writing her wake in the soup-green of the harbor, already on her way Batterywards!

Iron Morgan groaned and collapsed onto the topmost step. So this was the end of his roaring, hell-raising liberty! Locked up in the Statue of Liberty! All on account of this measly little cockroach of a rookie!

Then another thought seeped into his armor-plated cranium. Just *when* might he expect to be freed from this improvised brig? He had some faint recollection that the statue would not re-open until eight o'clock next morning. And by eight bells on the morrow, the *Texarkana* would be steaming down the Atlantic seaboard, past Hatteras, probably.

HE looked up to see Snig standing accusingly in front of him.

"Now see what yuh done!" said Snig. "Mah liberty expires at ten o'clock!"

Morgan sighed deeply.

"Well, how about *my* liberty?" he demanded. "Ya shrimp!"

"Ah'll be over-leave!" mourned Snig.

"Over-leave, hell! In ten days we'll be deserters!" Morgan had lost all desire now to exterminate his companion in misery. He satisfied himself with a growled threat:

"I oughta twist yer couplin's loose!"

"That won't git neither of us nowhere," Snig reminded him. "Reckon

we better declare a armistice, suh?"

Morgan lowered his face into his hands and did not reply. Out in the harbor came a short toot from a passing merchantman, then the distant striking of two bells. Five o'clock. The bells sounded like a funeral dirge.

SNIIG contemplated his shipmate sympathetically.

"Doan give up," he piped cheerfully. "We'll git out!"

"How?" snarled Morgan, lifting his face from his hands.

"Somehow! We plum got to!"

"Well, figger it out, worm," responded Morgan. He sadly lit a cigarette and settled on the step. "G'wan, git busy! My patience ain't gonna last fer always! And," he added, "lemme tell ya sumthin' else. If ya *don't* get us outa here, there'll only be one sailor left in the mornin'!"

Snig considered this proposition as he delved into his pocket for more peanuts.

"Hev a goober?" he offered very politely.

"No!" bellowed Morgan. The thought of a peanut made him seasick.

Snig turned then and descended the zig-zag stairs. To the bottom. Morgan heard him shake the door, which was securely bolted. He heard Snig foraging around down there, and wondered dully how many future liberties this A. W. O. L. was going to cost him. He could see his name on the watch-list, with a sinister red mark opposite it. His past record was not altogether spotless, and he could imagine the look on the chief engineer's face should he try to explain that he missed his ship on account of being locked up in the Statue of Liberty.

The chief had once told him that the only legitimate excuse for an

over-leave was sudden death. And in Morgan's case, he would demand a sworn affidavit and a good look at the corpse to believe that.

Snig returned presently. As he panted to the lofty perch where Morgan mourned, Morgan greeted him with a scowl.

"Wotcha got there, worm?"

Snig held up a coil of rope.

"Found hit in a paint locker down theah," he said cheerily.

"Yah? Wotcha figger on doin' with it? Hangin' yerself?"

"Ah figgered as how we mought bust out one o' them peek-holes."

"An eyeport, ya mean? Wot fer?"

"Well, yuh see, Ah'm sort o' small-like. I kin wriggle out. Yore big and husky, so if yuh'll lower me down, Ah'll git somebody to unlock that doah. An' then take us ashore!"

Iron Morgan meditated. He took a final drag at a cigarette, then flung it into the gloomy depths below. He got to his feet and pressed his face to the thick plate glass of an eyeport.

FAR below, he did not know how many hundred feet, was the insignificant speck of Liberty Island, with a watchman's shack at one corner of it, some distance from the statue. The spread of the harbor was a dizzy distance. It nauseated him to gaze upon it. His experience of the morning had not in any way abolished his deep-seated dread of high places.

When he turned and again faced Snig, his face was as green as the harbor water.

"Ya mean," he breathed, "that yer willin' ta let me dangle ya outa this here—" He suppressed a shudder.

"Sho' thing! Our only chanct, hain't it?"

Morgan swallowed hard and took the coil of rope from Snig's hand. He inspected it critically.

"The line, it ain't long enough," he said.

"Yessuh, hit is! Ah allow that when Ah'm at the rope's end, Ah'll grab hold down theah and make mah end fast. Then sling down yore end. Thataway Ah kin make it to the ground!"

MORGAN eyed the little gob with grudging admiration stealing into his eyes. He took another look from the eyeport. The distant lights of Manhattan and Jersey City were beginning to send thin glimmers of light across the water. Beacons blinked. Red and green riding lights swam to and fro along the busy road-stead. Ferries, like lighted dragons, plied in the maze of other craft. To his ears came the medley of harbor sound.

He shivered and then leaned back against the iron railing.

"Here goes, then," he said, raising one foot, and removing therefrom his heavy No. 11 shoe. He raised it over his shoulder and struck the eyeport a smart blow.

The glass cracked. He smashed again. It broke. Shattered particles dropped downward, against the copper sides of the statue. A cool, evening wind swept in.

He stuck his face out.

"Mebbe I can raise help by hol-lerin'," he said.

"Too much noise from ships," said Snig.

Nevertheless, Morgan tried a few "yahoes" and "ahoy below" signals. But even his great voice was drowned in that steady flow of sound that rose from the world's busiest port.

He finally gave up hopes in this direction.

"Awright, then," he grunted. He lashed one end of the coil of rope around Snig's skinny chest, while Snig squirmed out of the broken

eyeport, one hand gripping the slack of the rope, the other clutching his last popcorn ball.

"Ready?" said Morgan, hoarsely.

"Lower away, suh," came Snig's cheerful voice from the outside, where he clung.

Morgan wrapped the rope around one hand, and gave the little gob one long, shuddery gaze. His scalp puckered uncomfortably.

"Hey, worm!" he gurgled. "Do me a favor! Please lay off that damn popcorn ball! Woncha?"

Snig obligingly dropped the undevoured portion of it inside his blouse front. Morgan braced his feet and began paying out rope, foot by foot. The scraping of Snig's feet on the outer surface of the statue diminished until the sound ceased altogether.

Iron felt exceedingly sick and faint.

"Musta been that lousy likker," he complained to himself, shakily.

THE coil at his feet writhed and twisted. It grew smaller until the last coil crept up into his hands. He took a hitch then around his arm with the last fathom, while he secured the end of the rope to the iron railing at his back.

It was black-dark inside the statue now, and he sat down to wait for Snig, as he had suggested, to make fast his own end, down below. Then to untie the upper end from the railing and cast it outside.

He had barely seated himself, when a rasping sound came up to him, out of the darkness. He listened alertly. He heard the door open. The door that had slammed shut some two hours or more before!

"Hello! What's goin' on up there?"

It was the same voice that had called up at them before! The gruff voice of the statue watchman!

Morgan jumped to his feet with a

yell that echoed against the walls of his prison.

"Hold on, down there!" he yowled. "I'm comin'!"

He felt his way down the unlighted steps, down one zig-zag flight and another, until he reached the bottom, breathless. There the watchman turned the beam of a flashlight on him.

"I thought so!" he grunted. "A sailor! Why," he asked himself, "can't the Navy stay out on the ocean? Way out!"

"Take me ashore, mister," pleaded Morgan.

THE watchman considered. He bent a mercenary eye on the big sailor.

"Hm-mm," he reflected. "I might lend you a rowboat. But first you gotta dig up two dollars."

"Two bucks? What for?"

"For busting out a eyeport. Aw, don't deny it! The glass fell on my shack down there, and doggone near scared the daylight out o' me! I thought the old girl was tumblin' down!"

Morgan sadly delved into his starboard midships pocket. He counted out a crumpled dollar bill and eighty-five cents in small silver.

"There's my last penny, mister," said Morgan.

"It'll have to do, then, I suppose," said the watchman heartlessly. He reached out and pocketed the money. "C'mon, now."

They went outside and the watchman slammed and locked the door. It did not occur to slow-witted Iron Morgan, until they were half-way across to the boat landing, that the runt rookie was perched somewhere up there on the Goddess of Liberty, helpless either to ascend or descend. Not knowing how well the upper end of the rope was secured.

Slowly, then, the crocodile smile

returned to Morgan's mouth. His revenge! He had accomplished it after all, in a singularly neat and artistic manner.

"It won't hurt the little half-pint none to perch up there fer awhile," he argued to himself. "He's got it comin' to him!"

"There's the skiff," said the watchman, "tied to the piling, there. If you don't get run down by passin' steamers, you might reach the Battery in a coupla hours."

"Lend me a dime, mister," begged Morgan. "I gotta have carfare ta reach Brooklyn."

"Be off with ya!" said the watchman, "and be thankful I ain't havin' you arrested for destruction o' public propitty! Leave the skiff at the fireboat station, mind you!"

Morgan climbed down a slippery ladder, dropped into the small boat, untied the painter and took up the oars. A hard tussle with wind and tide and other hazards was ahead of him, but as he looked up at the pinpoint of electric light in the goddess' torch, and her diadem of other lights, he thought he could see something huddled on a coppery hump that was the Goddess of Liberty's portside hip.

SO he grinned with evil satisfaction as rapid oar dips carried him away from the boat landing.

"The engineers,
They have no fears . . ."

Morgan paused in his endless chanty as he thought he heard a faint, despairing yell. He heard it again, and his grin widened.

"Mebbe the watchman'll hear the little wart," he chortled. "But one thing sure, they ain't no more rowboats!"

". . . They never balk at trifles,
They hang by their toes . . ."

Iron Morgan pulled heartily, in

time to the tune. He was happily oblivious of the perils ahead of him.

IT was nearly an hour past midnight as the *Texarkana* steamed at quarter-speed down the channel towards Ambrose light. In the battleship's wardroom sat Lieutenant Varney, checking over his muster sheet. "All present and accounted for," he remarked to the chief engineer, who had just entered the wardroom on his way below, "except that rookie who reported aboard at noon. Didn't figure he'd go over the hill on his first liberty!"

"Navy's goin' to the dogs," remarked the chief engineer. "I lost a man in the big town, too. Big lug named Morgan. Good riddance, though. Hey, pantry! Bring me a cup o' coffee! Chop-chop!"

Lieutenant Varney closed his muster sheet, got up from the wardroom table, and started up on deck.

"I want a good-by look at the Goddess of Liberty," he said. "Lord knows when I'll see her again." Varney was an Atlantic Fleet officer and he didn't relish the West Coast cruise. As he ascended the companionway to the deck, he saw the statue off the *Texarkana's* starboard beam. Also, off the starboard bow was a freight-car barge, under tow, crossing the tide towards the Jersey City channel.

For some reason not immediately apparent, the barge had laid to, and was drifting onto the *Texarkana's* course, with scant seaway to spare.

The skipper of the *Texarkana*, up on the bridge, was having a case of the nervous jitters.

He yanked the whistle-cord and tooted a sharp warning to the unwieldy barge. The little tug, in charge of the barge tow, puffed valiantly to stem the current. The *Texarkana* skipper went to the voice-tube.

"Officer of the deck!" he called into the tube. "Man the searchlight over the galley! Help that doddered scow to stand clear!"

"Aye, aye, sir!" sang the officer of the deck. He passed the order and in prompt time the midships searchlight bathed the channel with its powerful beam.

"The barge seems to be picking up some knothead adrift in a row-boat," the skipper remarked to the bridge officer. "Now what the—?"

In the background of the searchlight's brilliant finger of light loomed the Statue of Liberty. Lieutenant Varney saluted her gravely. Then his seagoing eye was arrested by a speck that adorned a bulge on her coppery robe. He blinked and stared, fixedly. With rapid strides, then, he made way to the quarter-deck.

"Here, Quartermaster!" he barked. "Pass me your long-glass for a moment—!"

FOCUSING the long-glass on the statue, he stared transfixedly. He lowered the glass, then, and returned it to the quartermaster of the watch. Then he raced forward, and ran up the ladder leading to the bridge.

It was probably the first time in naval history that a man-o'-war stood by to rescue a sailor eating peanuts, not on a burning deck but on a lofty bump on a mighty statue. The motor launch from the *Texarkana* reached Liberty Island in a streak of foamy wake. Lieutenant Varney aroused the now bewildered watchman, and tore into the statue with the watchman and the rescue party from the ship at his heels.

"But I tell you there ain't no sailor in there!" the watchman was vociferating for the tenth time. "I know, because I already got one out—!"

But when Lieutenant Varney and his work party hauled in a long rope

and produced a dangling rookie, the watchman swore a large, round oath to the large, round moon.

"Migosh!" he demanded once more. "Why *don't* the Navy stay out in the ocean! In the middle!"

"Well, Lewis," was Lieutenant Varney's exasperated greeting of the unusual over-leave, "I hope you got fresh air enough to last you awhile!"

"Why-so, suh?" Snig inquired.

"Because it sure looks like you're going to make your first Navy cruise in the brig!"

THE skipper of the *Texarkana* was inclined to the same view when Snig was haled before him a little later. "I'm going to put you on bread and water till we reach Panama!" he vowed. "But before you're locked up, tell me how in the name of seventeen sins did you happen to be perched up there?"

"Well, suh," began Snig, "it was thisaway—"

Just then Admiral O'Houlihan, learning that the culprit responsible for the flagship's delay was on board, stormed onto the bridge.

"Captain!" he interrupted. "Bread and water is too good for this man! What is the Navy coming to, anyhow? Nothing but hell-raising nowadays! Too much liberty—!"

Snig Lewis turned towards the angry speaker. The overhead light revealed his face to Admiral O'Houlihan. The face of the little gob who had witnessed his tragic loss on the monkey-bridge, over Dry Dock No. 1. Thunderation! A horrible thought hit the admiral square between the eyes. What if this undersized rookie should make some painful, embarrassing allusion to *that*!

Why, in no time at all, he, Admiral O'Houlihan would be known throughout the entire Navy as the rum-swizzling commander-in-chief!

No, sir! It wouldn't do! Not in

these times! "It was thisaway, suh," Snig began again. "Ah was—!"

"Hold on, hold on!" broke in Admiral O'Houlihan. He had the ability to think fast on his feet, O'Houlihan did. That is how he had put the broad stripe on his sleeve.

His temper underwent a remarkable change. Like a simmering kettle when a chunk of ice is dropped into it. "Ahem!" he began again, more mildly. "Ahem! Come to think it over, Captain, there's nothing in the book of regulations that pertains to this—this offense. Am I right?"

"Yes, Admiral, you're right," the skipper prudently answered.

"It was thisaway," Snig began for the third time.

"Shut up!" roared Admiral O'Houlihan. Then he continued:

"LISTEN here, Captain," he suggested charitably, "suppose you let this—this man off with a reprimand. A mild reprimand."

"Very well, Admiral," agreed the skipper. Then to Snig:

"Lewis, go below and turn in!"

"Yessuh," said Snig, vastly relieved.

"Just another case of too much liberty," said the admiral. "Am I right?"

"Yes, Admiral," said the skipper, "you're right."

Snig, paused in the emergency cabin doorway, heard the words.

"Yo sho-enough are right, suh!" he piped up. "Ah've had moah Liberty than Ah knowed what ter do with!"

"Say!" demanded Admiral O'Houlihan, "didn't I tell you to shut up? And," he added meaningly, "to stay shut up?"

"Yes suh!" said Snig.

Whereupon he flitted from the bridge, and vanished down the ladder towards the berth-deck with the agility of a squirrel.

*Lieutenant Terry McLane, the Fighting Irishman,
Has the Greatest Battle of His Life in this
Action-Packed Sea Story*



In an instant the engine-room was a turmoil of frenzied men

NO RISK

By WILLIAM E. POINDEXTER

Author of "Murder Ship," "Winged Warrior," etc.

IT WAS a black night of howling wind and raging storm. The destroyer *Canute* flung onward through the tempest at a slow twenty knots per hour, rolling and plunging as only a destroyer can roll, shipping tons of water over her bow and forward decks.

In the brig, Lieutenant Terry McLane crouched on a bunk, his face twisted into deep lines of dejection and anxiety. Half his attention was

centered on the rhythmic throb of his beloved engines, while the other half was concentrated on the damning circumstances that had caused his incarceration in the brig.

The fleet had started its winter cruise to Guantanamo Bay, but the *Canute* had been left behind because of a defective boiler discovered at the last moment. When she finally put to sea the defect again became apparent, but the skipper had held her on her

course, fearing that she would be cheated out of the cruise altogether if he again put back for repairs.

Terry McLane muttered wrathfully under his breath at the folly of it. "Risk blowing her guts out to save a few days," he growled to himself, with the born engineer's disgust for a faulty power-plant, then shrugged his shoulders. The engines of the *Canute* were no longer any affair of his.

THEY had been no affair of his since the night before when Lieutenant Boyd, chief navigator, had been discovered in his cabin with a knife driven to the hilt in his back.

This would have concerned the chief engineer but little, except for the fact that it had been his knife which had killed Boyd.

It was unavoidable evidence against McLane, although there was no apparent motive, and the skipper, following the hard path of duty, had consequently arrested the chief on suspicion.

Terry shook his red head and snorted ragingly. "'Tis likely I'd have left my knife in him if I'd killed him, now ain't it?" he growled to himself. "'Twas a clever trick to throw the blame on me, and they'll stick me for it sure as hell unless—"

He paused, considering the matter thoughtfully. He had his own ideas of who had committed the murder. He knew that Halliday, chief machinist's mate, had hated Boyd with an abiding hatred, although he didn't know the reason for it.

He had also discovered Halliday washing a red stain from his cuff on the night of the murder. It was a slender enough thread on which to base suspicion, but he clutched at it as eagerly as a drowning man is said to clutch at a straw. It might mean the difference between life and a degrading and shameful death to him.

For in Terry's own Irish heart, he believed that his assistant was just the type to drive a knife into the back of a man he hated, given the opportunity. Yet he had no proof that would offset the damning evidence of that knife.

"Thunder!" groaned the chief, doubling his big battle-scarred fist into an iron ball, "if I'd had it in for Boyd, I'd have smashed the face of him, and maybe give him the boot as is the proper way to deal with an enemy, but a knife in the back—wurra!"

He shook his head dismally, feeling the noose already tightening around his neck. The helplessness of his situation was what depressed him most. There was nothing subtle about the chief of the *Canute*.

He was a smashing, fighting Irishman who was afraid of nothing that he could face with doubled fists, but this was something he could not fight. He could only wait for what was to happen—wait in hopeless misery.

YET even this could not quite hold his attention from his crippled engines. Feeling the long, narrow ship hesitate and quiver to the buffeting of the waves, he knew that the wind was now blowing a hurricane.

He could picture the gigantic black waves cascading over the slender bow, smashing against the pilot house and the four stubby stacks of the *Canute*, smothering her in flying spume. And Halliday was in charge of the engine room with that defective boiler to contend with.

Halliday was a good engineer, but he was apt to lose his head in an emergency, and besides, Terry was convinced that he was the killer of Lieutenant Boyd.

The chief gritted his teeth, his fingers itching for the throttle of his engines. He knew those engines as a mother knows her child. He loved

them, and he thought that they knew and loved him, responding to the touch of his hands with a human intelligence, as they would respond to no other man.

He glanced up as the master-at-arms flung open the door of the brig, and the skipper entered, to stand staring down upon him, his face strangely gray under the swaying electric light.

"Terry," said Commander Lewis at last, his lips twitching in a way that was foreign to his usual grim stoicism, "I want you to take command of the engine-room again."

FOR an instant the Irishman's face flamed with elation, then he scowled and shook his head.

"I'm suspected of murder, sir," he said bitterly, "and as long as I'm under suspicion I will not touch the engines. No, not if Halliday runs her nose into the bottom. God knows I never used a weapon besides my own two fists against any man—I never needed to," he added simply.

The commander's lips tightened. "Terry," he said tensely, "with the evidence against you, I was only doing my duty in putting you under arrest, and you know it. What else could I do?"

"But I've just had an SOS from the *Mavis*. She carries passengers—women and children—and she's sinking by the head about fifty miles to the north of us. Her boats are destroyed and the message states that she can't live two hours in this storm."

He paused, the strained lines in his face deepening. "We're only making twenty knots and Halliday is afraid to put more steam in that boiler. We'll never make it in time at this rate. Terry, you're the only man on God's seas who can get the most out of those engines without blowing us all to hell."

As he listened, the chief knew in his heart that he was going down to the engine-room and fight those engines as he had never fought before, but his stubborn Irish pride would not let him give in easily. Again he shook his head.

"I will not," he stated savagely. "I'm practically convicted of murder just because the actual killer was smart enough to steal my knife to do his murdering with. I'm locked up without having a chance, while the killer is laughing up his sleeve. To hell with you all! 'Tis all I have to say."

The commander's face contracted in a spasm of pain and anger. He hesitated a moment, started to turn away, then swung back again.

"Terry," he cried hoarsely, "my wife is on board the *Mavis*. I haven't any right to think of that now—it's a personal matter, but you are the only one who can get us there in time. Terry, if I beg you as a personal favor—"

A CURIOUS light gleamed in the Irishman's eyes and he felt a tug at his heart.

"Sir," he said softly, "if I take the *Canute* through in time, will you squash this murder charge against me?"

He watched intently the conflicting emotion on the skipper's drawn face. It was the hardest decision a man was ever called upon to make. For an instant Lewis slumped wearily against the bulkhead, then he snapped himself erect.

"McLane," he said with cold deliberation, "you are not a man—you are a fiend. I am a sailor first and last and I know what my duty is. You may stay here and rot, but I'll see you hanged for murder if it's the last thing I ever do!"

He whirled jerkily on his heel, his face twisted in grim passion, but be-

fore the door could clang shut, Terry was on his feet and scrambling up the ladder, a warm admiration for the skipper in his heart. For Terry was a sailor, too.

When McLane's feet hit the engine-room deck, Halliday looked at him with a sigh of relief, although the two had never liked each other. But the responsibility of his position had been too much for him and he was glad to shift the weight to McLane's capable shoulders.

THE rest of the engine-room crew reacted to the chief's presence. They knew he was under suspicion of murder, but they had loved the roaring, fighting Irishman and they had supreme faith in his ability to handle any emergency.

Terry cast one glance at the steam gauge, saw that it registered a scant two hundred and fifty pounds, and sneered openly.

"Afraid of her, huh?" he jeered, tugging the turbine throttle wide open, his hands caressing the shining brass work with loving touch, his practiced eyes roving over instruments and gauges in swift, darting glances.

"Yes, I'm afraid of her—as any sensible man would be." Halliday growled back sullenly. "'Push her to the danger-point,' the skipper says. Hell! How can I tell what that boiler will stand? Another twenty-five pounds might blow the bottom out of her."

"So-o?" crooned the chief softly. "Well, Halliday, we'll just see how much she'll stand. The *Mavis* is almost fifty miles to the north. That means the old girl will have to get up and paw the air—boiler or no boiler. And, Halliday, I can tell you exactly when she has too much pressure."

"How?" questioned the assistant disbelievingly.

"When she blows us to hell!" retorted the chief succinctly, and grinned maliciously as the other's face whitened.

He whirled suddenly to the fire room and roared orders that caused the firemen to spring to their jobs, putting on the big burner tips that would spray hundreds of gallons of oil an hour into the combustion chambers.

With the added fuel, the fire boxes began to roar ominously, with angry tongues of flame shooting out around the edges, and slowly the throb of the engine took on a swifter note—a smooth but challenging clatter and clang that caused the slim greyhound of the seas to leap forward like a live thing.

Terry McLane glanced at the speed indicator and shook his head. Only twenty-five knots. They were picking up speed too slowly to suit their need for haste. He turned to his assistant.

"Get those safety valves fastened down. Chain 'em. I need that steam," he snapped. Halliday gasped. Chain the safety valves down with the steam pressure at two hundred and eighty, and a weakened boiler that would, if it exploded, turn the engine-room into a hell of scalding steam?

"**Y**OU'RE crazy!" he shouted back, the perspiration streaming down his white face—perspiration that was not entirely caused by the reeking heat of the room.

McLane turned slowly upon him and realized again with a fresh shock that the man was a shivering coward. Yellowness, in the chief's rough and tumble code of morals, was the cardinal sin.

"And sticking a knife in a man's back is a coward's way of fighting," was his fleeting thought before he forgot everything else but the fact

that he must crowd his engines to the danger-point—aye, and beyond!—if he were to reach the *Mavis* in time. "Halliday," he said with deceptive gentleness, but with cold deadliness in his voice, "crazy or not, I'm in charge of this engine-room. You'll obey my orders, or you'll wish that knife had been in your back instead of Boyd's!"

FOR an instant the gaze of the two men locked in a battle of wills; then Halliday backed away, cowed, and gave the order in a shaking voice. Instantly men were swarming over the boilers, chaining down the safety valves which were already giving forth their warning jets of steam.

Terry McLane continued to fondle the turbine throttle, his every sense alert. His face was calm, but there was a dancing battle light in the depths of his blue eyes.

His ears were strained for any break in the rhythmic throb of the engines. He crooned softly to them in a soft Irish brogue and was convinced that they heard and understood. Beneath his expert guidance they responded as intelligently as might a high-bred horse.

"Darlin's, ye wouldn't fail me now," he sang confidently.

He glanced at the boiler from which the danger could be expected, and knew with some instinct which is possessed only by the born engineer, that the pressure had not yet reached the danger-point. Just how much pressure it would stand, no man could tell by reason alone, but Terry McLane's sure instinct was guiding him now, and he relied upon it fully.

The steam gauge was indicating three hundred and twenty pounds of pressure now, and the ship was rocketing along through the storm at a full thirty-six knots and steadily increasing her speed.

As she raced along, fighting her

gallant battle against time and impending death, the *Canute* was lifting her bows and showing her bottom like a racing boat, while the flames from her stacks lighted the storm-driven waves with a red glare that was nerve-shaking to those far up in the little pilot house.

Commander Lewis glanced at the speed indicator and gasped. That weakened boiler could never stand the strain, and again he fought a fierce battle between love and duty to his men and his ship.

Every instinct within him urged him to drive ahead to the rescue of his wife, regardless of all risks, but grim duty, the ancient tradition of men who go down to the sea in ships, held him in its grip. When he finally caught up the speaking tube, he was limp and shaken, but his voice was firm and decided when McLane answered his ring.

"TERRY," he shouted down the tube, "remember that no matter what happens, our duty is to the crew and the ship. Don't push her beyond her endurance. It won't help matters to send her to the bottom."

McLane's voice was lilting with Irish impudence. He had nothing to lose now, and for once in his turbulent life he found himself in a position where he could "talk back" to his skipper.

"Do you take care of your bridge, sir," he chanted back, "and leave my engines to me. They're speaking sweetly, and if 'tis more speed you want, 'tis more speed I'll give you."

"Terry," the skipper's voice was shaken with emotion, "I'm sorry for what I said down in the brig. You're a white man, and I'm proud of you, whether you killed Boyd or not. Push her hard, but forget the personal element and don't take unnecessary risks."

"Divil a risk, sir," chirped Terry,

and hung up the tube. The engines were beginning to vibrate unpleasantly now, racking the whole ship with their thundering clamor, while the forced draft roared viciously.

"My God, sir," Halliday yelled in his ear, "look at that indicator—she's doing two knots better than she ever did in her speed tests—and with a rotten boiler! Three hundred and fifty pounds pressure. I tell you it's suicide!"

McLANE grinned at him calmly, but his pulses were beginning to race under the hammering throb of his heart which seemed to keep time to the beat of the engines, and every nerve was strained in expectation of the tell-tale hiss of steam that would betoken the beginning of the end.

He eyed his white-faced assistant with jeering contempt.

"Don't yell before you're hurt," he snapped. "I'll make an honest-to-God engineer out of you before this cruise is finished."

"You'll blow me to hell!" the other shrilled back at him, and Terry shrugged his shoulders. "'Twould be no more than you deserve," he muttered to himself, and as he eyed the boiler anxiously, he was not sure but what the assistant was right.

Steam pressure was nearing the three hundred and sixty pound mark, but he couldn't slacken speed now. Every minute, every second even, was precious.

His vivid imagination pictured the disabled steamer, her boats gone, wallowing and plunging in the trough of the sea, the waves washing over her, threatening to send her to the bottom, and his lips tightened in grim resolve.

And then he saw a new menace. Every man in the engine- and fire-room crews knew about that weakened boiler.

They knew only too well the danger they were in.

But they were working with the steady efficiency of trained Navy men, nerves under control, enduring the menace stoically. Yet McLane knew how little it took to start a panic sometimes. He could not afford that now.

He called an oiler to him, a youngster he had noted often for his cool courage, and spoke in his ear.

"Are ye with me, lad?" he questioned.

The oiler wiped his sweaty, grimy face and shot him a comprehensive glance. "To the limit, sir," he replied simply.

Terry grinned. "'Tis an Irishman you are, sure," he murmured. "Now, listen, lad. I want you to batten down all the escapes from the engine-room and the fire-room. Understand? Go about it quietly, but fasten 'em securely. I don't like the looks of things entirely."

THE oiler nodded and glanced across to where Halliday stood, his face white and strained. "There's where the trouble will come from," he said grimly, with a side jerk of his head. "Got a gun, sir?"

Terry laughed and held up his two knotted fists, the muscles in his fore-arms twisting and writhing powerfully. "They are better than a gun, lad," he grinned, "and they never miss fire!"

The oiler nodded and began his work of battening down the escapes. The men began to shift about and mutter uneasily as they saw themselves trapped, but they were Navy men, trained to endure, and they stuck grimly to their posts. And whether they knew it or not, it was the placid calm of their chief's face, the quizzical twist of his smiling Irish mouth that gave them renewed courage.

But Terry knew that from now on it was a question of blind luck whether that boiler held together or not. Hide it as he would, he was growing unsure of himself under the strain, no longer able to trust his instinct. He knew it must be nearly daylight now, and he was waiting tensely for a hail down the speaking tube that would tell him that the *Mavis* had been sighted.

BUT no man knew that beneath his air of calm indifference, his sure certainty, he had grown horribly afraid. Yet, being afraid, he merely braced his legs more sturdily against the plunging roll of the ship, grinned, and tugged again at the already open throttle.

Once, years before, he had seen the results of a boiler explosion; the shrieking hiss of escaping steam that stripped men's skin to the raw and quivering flesh and drove them into screaming insanity, before it mercifully killed them.

Bare as he was, it was a thing that McLane could not contemplate without an inward shiver of sheer horror. Yet he stood, swaying easily to the lurch of the *Canute*, his eyes smiling and serene as if no danger menaced them.

He turned on his heel as a voice, shrill with panic, reached his ears. It was Halliday, hailing the bridge through the speaking tube.

"He has us imprisoned like rats in a trap, with all hatches battened down," the man was babbling to the commander. "I think he's insane. We haven't got a chance—the boilers will go at any moment and—"

But that was as far as he got. With a savage, cat-like leap, the chief drove his big fist squarely between Halliday's eyes, and the man reeled back and crashed to the floor.

Terry McLane stood above him, the mad lust to kill raging behind

his blue eyes, then he spat with supreme contempt and turned away.

But Halliday was crazed with fear. He crawled to his feet, the blood streaming down his face, and staggered over to where Terry stood at the throttle.

"Damn you!" he screamed, "it's murder—that's what it is—murder! You know you're going to hang anyway, and you don't care what happens. You shunt the steam and shunt it quick, or I'll kill you!"

Terry drew back his big fist to strike again, then hesitated. For the moment he had forgotten the murder charge that hung over him, but the assistant's words brought it forcibly to his mind again.

A sudden wild thought struck him and caused his heart to leap fiercely. The man's nerve was breaking, and here was a chance that might turn their desperate situation to his own advantage. Eagerly, cunningly, he grasped it instantly.

"Right you are, Halliday," he shouted grimly. "I'm not a murderer but I'll hang for it just the same. I don't give a damn what happens. If I blow the ship to hell, at least it will be a cleaner death than hanging!"

AT that tense moment, cold water, dangerous but necessary, was pumped into the boilers and they responded with a roaring clang and clamor that almost burst the ear drums. The glass of steam gauges shivered out and struck the floor with a tinkle, and the steel deck of the engine-room vibrated with a force that stung men's feet through thick soles.

With a wild shriek, Halliday cowered away, throwing his arms before his face in a shielding gesture, and McLane held his breath, awed by the unholy thunder of mighty power held under leash.

But Halliday was beyond reason;

from beneath his coveralls he snatched an automatic pistol, thumbed the safety and pressed the trigger.

The heavy slug seared across the chief's red head, leaving a long bloody streak, clanged sharply against metal, and ricocheted against the far bulkhead. Before Halliday could fire again, McLane was upon him in a panther-like leap, roaring in mighty, savage rage.

BUT his knotted fist did not fall. Instead he grasped the weapon, gave it a quick twist and wrenched it from the assistant's nerveless hand. Then a slow, terrible grin overspread his face as his eyes bored into Halliday's.

He leaned close to the cowering man, his voice vibrant, deadly. "I'm going to drive this bumboat to hell, Halliday," he yelled. "What do I care what happens as long as I'm to hang anyway? But it isn't a pleasant way to die, is it, man?"

Breathlessly he watched the other's face as he clawed the air in frantic gestures and struggled to speak. If, as he was convinced, the man was guilty of Boyd's murder, now was the best chance he would ever have to force a confession from him. He was working his hunch to the limit.

But while he waited, there came the sudden shrill scream of escaping steam. "There she goes!" yelled a voice, and every man stood rooted in his tracks. There was nothing they could do now to avert the catastrophe.

Tense and grim, Terry McLane peered through the mist and breathed a great sigh of relief as he saw what had happened. One of the chains had loosened and a safety valve was popping off, filling the room with hot, reeking steam that would do no damage. But he saw his chance and he took it without hesitation.

His hand shot out to a lever, then

he looked Halliday straight in the eyes and laughed aloud. "Our only chance is to shunt the steam," he yelled, "but I'd rather be blown to hell than hang. Let her go!"

But Halliday had reached the breaking point. His face was a yellow mask from which his eyes gleamed with a red, insane light, and he raised his shaking, claw-like hands.

"I killed him," he screamed suddenly. "I stole your knife to throw suspicion on you, and killed Boyd with it! Now for God's sake shunt that steam—I can't die like this!"

Terry drew himself up to his full height, filled with a surging relief and unexpected triumph, and looked around. A dozen men, held spellbound by the tense drama enacted there in the over-heated engine-room, with death thundering about them, had heard the confession.

HE nodded his head in silent satisfaction and stepped forward, measuring Halliday with calculating eyes. Grim, implacable, his fist drew slowly back, then it shot forward with a hundred and eighty pounds of brawn behind it, caught Halliday on the point of the chin and lifted him clear of the floor.

His body struck in a corner, rolling limply to the heave and lurch of the destroyer.

McLane turned away just in time to meet the wild rush of men from the fire-room. The sudden hiss of escaping steam had snapped their already overstrained nerves, and the fact that they found the fire-room escapes effectively closed, merely added to their panic.

Convinced that the chief was a mad-man bent on their destruction, they charged wildly, but the engine-room crew remained loyal and met the rush fiercely.

A wild-eyed fireman snatched up

Halliday's pistol which had skidded across the floor, firing wildly. But Terry McLane, now thoroughly aroused, burst through and caught the man's wrist in a paralyzing grip.

The automatic dropped into his hand as the bone in the fireman's arm snapped, but scorning to use it, he hurled it over a boiler and swung his mighty fists in smashing blows.

In an instant the engine-room was a turmoil of frenzied, shouting and fighting men. Locked together between steel bulkheads, with hideous death thundering about them, they fought with the fierce savagery of ravening beasts.

Once McLane went down under the glancing blow of a hurled wrench, felt feet that trampled him heedlessly, and scrambled up again, his voice roaring defiance above the clamor of the engines.

IN the hot, vitiated air of the room, such fury could not last long. The firemen were being slowly driven back, their panic subsiding somewhat as there was no immediate explosion.

And then came the signal which Terry had long awaited. Slow speed ahead! It meant that the *Mavis* had been sighted, beyond a doubt. It meant that the battle was won.

Fearing now that the boiler might let go on the very verge of success, he fought his way frantically forward, hurling men to left and right.

It would be fatal to shut down the power now with such a head of steam, but the emergency trips shunted it, and instantly the speed of the destroyer diminished.

Stunned by the sudden release from danger, the men stood panting, dripping with sweat. The stop signal came, Terry closed the throttle slowly, and the *Canute* rose and fell in the trough of the sea, but apparently the fury of the storm had abated.

AFTER what seemed hours of waiting, Commander Lewis' voice came down the speaking tube.

"McLane?" he questioned, his voice shaking with relief, "we arrived just in time to save the passengers. We're bringing them off in the boats now. It was a record run, Terry."

"Sure, sir," retorted the chief with wicked nonchalance, "'tis nothing to what she could do if I pushed her. And by the way, Halliday very kindly confessed to murdering Boyd."

"Great! I didn't think you were the kind to knife a man in the back. And Terry—you drove her hard, but I suppose you took no unnecessary risks?"

"No, sir—never a risk," said Terry McLane innocently. Then he hung up the tube, mopped his haggard face, and grinned weakly to himself.

"'Twas a good lie—I hope the skipper believed it!" he muttered, as he turned wearily back to his engine.

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CHAPTER I

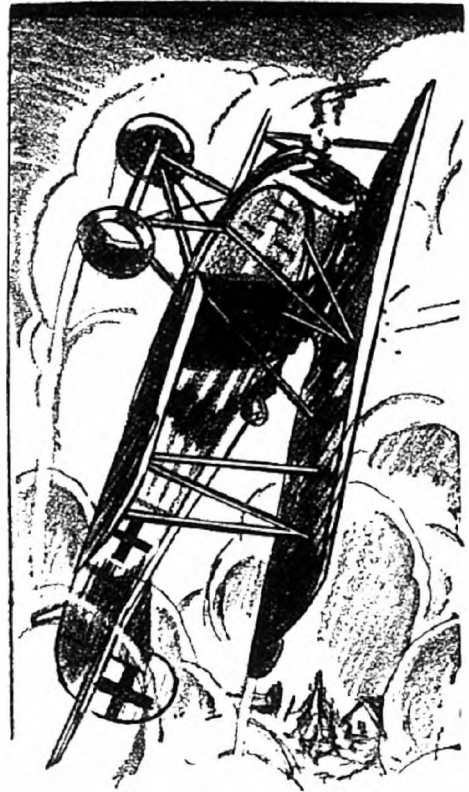
Abysmal Silence

STRANGLING fingers of numbing terror clutched at the throat of Allan Strang as the awful silence settled over the dozen Spads, the squadron of Fokkers, the Vickers and the Spandaus.

One second and the sky had been filled with the smashing diapason of roaring motors full out, on ships which spun and dived like chips in a maelstrom. Bees which were bullets that had hummed across his cockpit, no longer hummed. The chattering of guns had died away into the abysmal silence.

Yet, save for the lack of sound, nothing had changed.

The Ninth Squadron was still in there with the Germans, fighting like the sky bulldogs they were. Strang could still see the tendrils of smoke about a score of spinner caps. By the blurs of many propellers he knew that all the motors still were full out.



The Red Fokker nosed

But he heard nothing.

His lips twisted wryly as he realized what had happened.

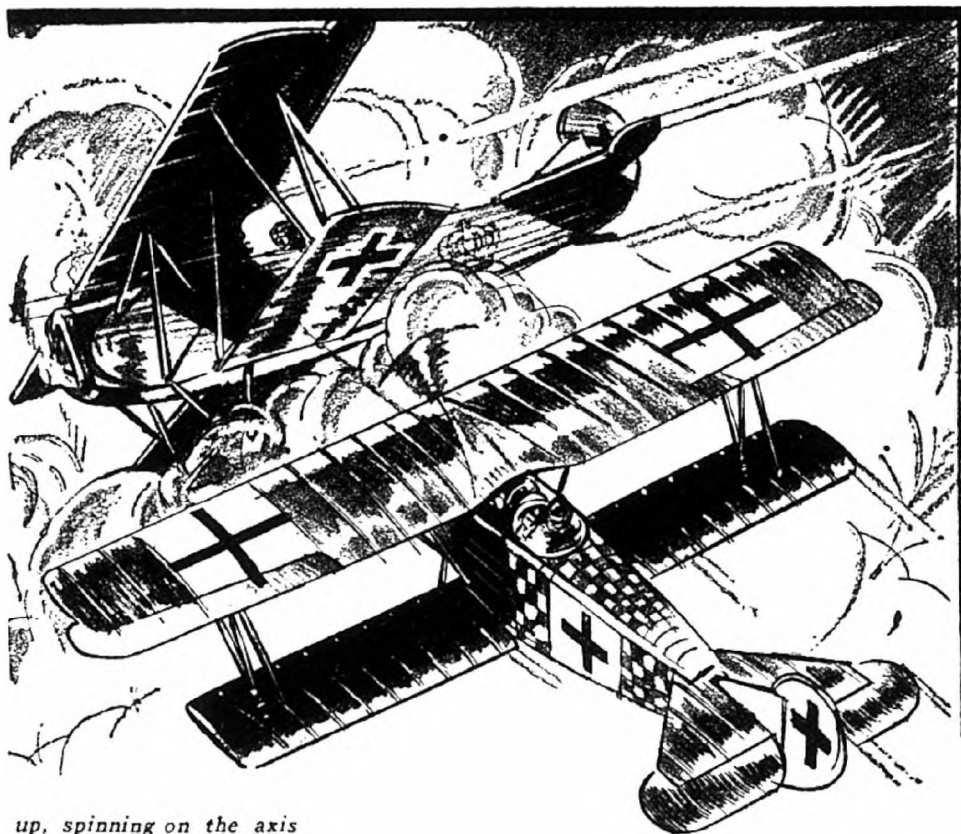
"Well," he told himself harshly, "I asked for it, I guess."

He was thinking of his hobby, begun way back when he had been a child. His father had been totally deaf and had filled his son with fear of deafness—so that, since his grammar school days, Allan Strang had experimented with lip reading.

"Yes," he said again, "I asked for it."

A Fokker darted across in front of his Spad. It hung between earth and sky, plastered against the blue like a bat nailed to a screen, directly ahead of him.

Of course, no ship hung like that, for automatically, as the Fokker flashed across, he had shunted the nose of his Spad to follow, so that



up, spinning on the axis

it seemed the Fokker did not move at all.

Strang's slim strong fingers dropped swiftly, surely, to the triggers of his Vickers. He saw them bounce and jump on their mounts. He felt them grow hot under his hands. He saw the tracers smash out at the enemy cockpit—but he heard nothing at all.

The Fokker dipped away, with a head lolling on the cockpit coaming. For a split second after he saw his bullets go home, Strang looked into the white face of the enemy, upturned to glare into the muzzles of his death-dealing Vickers. He was so close he saw the lips of the enemy move—but no, he found he could not read them. It was too far, and the Fokker traveled too fast, falling away, dropping in deadly, appalling silence down the sky.

Gone for the moment was the necessity of savage combat, the attack and retreat of bitter dog-fight. Strang's hand went to his forehead and came away wet—and red. He jerked off his gauntlet and ran his hand through his hair, following a queer bleeding wound which angled down over his temple past his right ear. "That's what did it," he said to himself. "My God! Never again to hear! Birds; music; voices of friends and loved ones. Not even my own voice. But there is one thing that makes it bearable—now. I can't hear the maddening drumming of gunfire, the roaring of motors gone mad, nor the smashing of bullets!"

Since he could not hear, his vision must serve now both as ears and as eyes—and that would not be easy. His lips became a firm straight line.

He realized if ever his injury were

discovered, or rather the result of it, he would be read out of the air service.

The service needed men who could hear.

His superiors must not know. He must begin to lie; in a way, cheat. But he could not well be criticized for it.

He looked at his reddened hand before he placed it back on the stick. It did not tremble. He smiled to himself, and the smile had something in it that no German would have relished. It was a death's-head smile, a grim twisting of the lips that was somehow other-worldly. Some great change had come to him in the silence.

IT was oddly like the numbing effects of alcohol. One had a don't-give-a-damnish feeling about it all, as if nothing mattered in the least. And when nothing mattered, a weight lifted from the soul.

Strang saw a string of holes begin to eat a way across his instrument board, coming in from his right. He slipped away with the speed of light, before the bullets could push his backbone through his belly.

Hitherto, such a happening would have made his stomach taut as a washboard, his lips brittle and cold, and turned his heart to stone. Now—he merely slipped away.

He cork-screwed down swiftly, getting out of range, while he looked back at the Fokker whose pilot had almost ended the new experience he was enjoying. He saw a hooded falcon's head through the propeller blur, a white face set in grim lines, a crouching body behind twin Spandau guns.

There, but for a bit of luck, rode the man who would have cut his back to ribbons, banding it with streamers of crimson—and the nose of Strang's Spad was coming up to

wreak vengeance for what might have been.

The Fokker flung itself like a stiff red mantle against the sky as its pilot divined Strang's intention. But Strang set his lips grimly, cast swift glances around to make sure he flew into no trap, and brought his nose slewing over to cover the fuselage of the Fokker.

The German was tenacious. He was also a fine flyer, but just now Strang felt that nobody could hold him. The Fokker whipped away as Strang's tracers started eating their way forward from its tail. Strang shifted his feet and his hands, forcing the Spad to his will, and his hands dropped to his triggers as his feet bit into the rudder bar and his knees held the stick steady.

He watched his Vickers do their grim, awful duty, and was at peace. Sound had always emphasized the fact that he sought to slay. Now, when one sought to do murder in silence, it did not somehow seem so bad.

His guns buck-jumped on their mounts. His eyes were glued to his ring-sights and he was forcing the Fokker's pilot into his line of sights.

The man was looking back, moving from side to side in his pit as Strang swept onto his tail, as though he were trying to rock his Fokker out of line.

HE shook a savage fist at Strang, and it was the last time his hand ever closed into a fist.

Maybe he tried to shake it in a fist when Strang's bullets hammered into his back, but the gesture changed instead to the defeated flyer's salute, as the hand with fingers that trembled in the last convulsive effort of the doomed—touched the falcon's hood of the flyer.

Black smoke poured from under the Fokker's motor housing, even as

the pilot's body slid out of sight, and was shrouded by evil tongues of flame that swept back over the pit.

Strang shuddered a little. Smoke and flame in such a silence—so complete and absolute—was a little awful. But even then there was peace in it, as though the man who had shook his fist was really untroubled about dying. The Boche ship went down, spinning.

And then three Fokkers were trying to box him in and Strang forgot the two he had sent down in a desperate, savage attempt to save his own life and get back to his drome to work out his new dilemma.

HOW he fought out did not matter; that his wing fabric was in shreds and his struts were splinters; that his wings sagged fearfully when he pulled out of even, shallow dives, did not matter—the ship hung together. That was enough.

He felt no special relief when the Germans finally pulled out of the fray and cut for home as a dozen Nieuports came barging into the fight without being asked.

The American flight leader, Captain Hines, signaled for formation, and waved his flyers home. Strang looked about him as he fell in to the right rear of the retreating V. Two Spads had paid toll to the Germans.

He grinned a little. He himself had paid for those two, though he had come close to paying in his own turn.

The flight circled the home drome. Hines signaled the flyers down in proper order. Strang dropped down, easing his ship in, feeling his way in with a Spad that might go to pieces when the wheels struck the earth. It would be a poor way to die, coming home.

His Spad's wheels touched. The ship rolled swiftly and easily toward

the tented hangars. Strang grinned to himself. He seemed even to fly with more surety. This was a strange kind of drunkenness. Perhaps the others, if they knew, would envy him this thing which had been given him.

He climbed from the pit when the ship stopped rolling, and shook his head as he noticed that his right wing dragged the ground. The ground crew took it in hand, the sergeant in charge shrugging his shoulders and looking at Strang with awed wonder in his eyes.

The squadron commander, Major Howes, came striding across the tarmac, his glance playing over the ships which had come home. His black eyes missed nothing whatever. He stopped dead still when he saw the wreck of a Spad which Strang had brought safely in. He stared at Strang for a moment. Then he moved aside and spoke with Captain Hines.

Strang watched their lips, but the officers were sidewise to him—and he was a little out of practice. That made him afraid for a moment, but only for a moment, because just then Hines turned full toward him, pointing out something to the Major on Strang's Spad—and Strang saw the words on his lips:

"Not another one of us could have gone through the box he was caught in, let alone bring that ship home."

MAJOR HOWES nodded curtly and strode toward Strang.

Strang waited, leaning against his riddled fuselage. Howes looked at the ship again, then stood directly before Strang.

"You get the job," his tense lips said, "provided you want it. I wouldn't order anyone to do it. But if you'd volunteer—"

He left it hanging in the air. Strang hoped he had not misread the

moving lips of the squadron's master. He wondered what the job was, but whatever it was he felt himself able to cope with it.

"Whatever it is, Skipper," he said, "I'll do it."

"It's lone wolf stuff, fifteen miles behind the lines, Strang," said Skipper Howes. "You haven't got as much chance of pulling it off as a celluloid dog has of catching the hellcat; but the others have even less and someone has to go."

"I've said I'd do it, Skipper," said Strang. "What is it, sir?"

"It's night stuff. Wait until everybody is in the mess hall tonight."

CHAPTER II

The Mission

WHEN supper call sounded nobody had yet discovered the thing which had happened to Allan Strang. One man, Lieutenant Gabriel, had almost discovered. Strang had nearly jumped out of his skin when, crossing the tarmac, a heavy hand had slapped him on the shoulder, spun him about.

"What's the idea of day-dreaming, Allan? I swear I've yelled my head off right in your ear."

Gabriel had a big mouth that was easy to read.

"Sorry, Gabe," said Strang. "I must have been thinking. Used to be that way in school. Sometimes my mind went wool-gathering and the prof had to paste me to make me snap out of it."

"And what's wrong with your voice? Something queer about you since today's fight. You're batty! The others have noticed it, too. Why whisper at me? Afraid of something?"

Gabriel was grinning and Strang realized he had made a slight mistake. He remembered that most deaf

people talked louder than was necessary. Knowing this he had leaned over backward and spoken too softly. Gabriel had noticed.

"No," said Strang. "I guess I was startled. I was thinking of that buzzard who creased me today, thinking how I'd like to have him at close quarters, where I could put my hands on him. When you batted me, I thought he'd got the jump on me. Kinda nervous, I guess."

Gabriel looked at him queerly, but when Strang vouchsafed no further explanation, shrugged his shoulders.

"Let's get in. The Old Man's got something up his sleeve. Must be tough, too. His face looked as though he'd either swallowed bitter gall or had seen a ghost."

Strang wondered if the facial expression to which Gabriel referred had anything to do with what Howes had said to him. He'd soon know.

They ate supper. Major Howes rose from his place, straight and stern—a fine figure of a soldier. No desk officer, this man, but a driving disciplinarian, who could fly and fight with the best of his buzzards.

HIS black eyes bored into those of his men.

"We've got a job, fellows," he said grimly. "It's been handed to us by Intelligence. I confess I don't like it. The Air Service's got no business picking up the pieces Intelligence can't hold, but this order comes directly from headquarters, so it's up to us—"

Howes paused for a moment, taking a deep breath. Unknown to himself, Strang was shaping with his own lips the words of his commanding officer. But none noticed because all eyes were on the Old Man.

"It's our job," went on Howes, "because it lies nearest to us—and because they do us the honor to believe we've got men who can handle it."

Here it is: Fourteen miles directly east of Masmunster—that's seventeen miles behind the lines—is an area of wild swamp land.

"No troops could march through it. It's as bad as the region of the Masurian Lakes where Hindenburg trapped the Russians. It has no military value, or so headquarters has believed until the last two weeks. However, two agents got to wondering about things they had heard—parts of a queer story about—about—"

Again the Old Man hesitated and Strang saw that look in his face which Gabriel had noticed and wondered about—the look of a man whose soul is haunted by some dread nameless thing. But Howes gave his dread a name.

"—the story about, well, I might as well say it: Red fog!"

THERE was something so odd about it that Gabriel burst out, repeating the two words:

"Red fog! What the hell—?"

Then he bit his words short off, clamping his teeth down on them. Eyes were turned on him, making him self-conscious. Strang saw the major glance toward Gabriel, but didn't see the words on the lips of his wing-mate. He'd missed something, but he knew about what it was.

Red fog! Hell's bells! The Old Man was speaking in parables—or had he, Strang, misread the taut lips of the skipper?

"Did you say red fog?" he asked.

It was an allowable question even to a man who could hear.

Howes nodded his head.

"Yes. Intelligence got word back to the two agents. They were to go into the swamps and find out what was behind the queer stories. Intelligence agents have to do things like that—run down everything.

"The red fog might be—nobody

knew what. It might spell disaster, might mean anything or nothing. The first agent went in. The second waited for him a week beyond the time agreed upon, at the rendezvous they had arranged. Then he went in, in his turn, after contacting still a third man and instructing him to stand by. Well—the second agent came back—"

Again that pregnant pause before going on. Now lines, fresh lines, or old ones that were suddenly deeper and therefore more noticeable, etched themselves in Howes' cheeks.

"Yes, the second agent came back. God knows how he knew enough to come back to the rendezvous, but he did. You see, the man was stark raving mad.

"He babbled of things he had seen and heard—of strange high, piercing sounds in the woods which masked the swamp land, of sounds that hammered against the eardrums, continuous and monotonous like the never-ending beating of tom-toms, until the noise thrummed against the very soul and turned it craven. And he had found the first agent, half-naked and babbling of red fog.

THE second agent tried to lay hands on the first—but could not. The first agent, in the end, after a long chase, led the second one deeper into the swamp, waiting for him at last on the edge of a bubbling pool of mud. There he turned, grinning, and said: 'It can't get me here!' Then he dropped in and the mud swallowed him.

"The agent who came back was still sane then, but traveling through the woods, always in danger of quicksands, and listening to the sounds, thinking of a mysterious red fog—well, I've told you how he came back.

"Now, gentlemen, it's up to us. Intelligence thinks it's a job for a

flyer. We've got to find out about the red fog. If it's a new kind of gas—God Almighty, men, can't you imagine it!

"Suppose a red fog were to sweep over our trenches that would turn our men into maniacs, who would turn on one another with ripping bayonets, trench knives, automatics, hand grenades! You see, we've got to find out about the red fog! Who will go?"

HOWES looked directly at Allan Strang.

Strang, expecting this, jumped to his feet.

"I'll take it, sir," he said.

Gabriel leaped up, and Hines, and Everman, and Johannes. But Howes waved them down.

"Strang spoke first," he said grimly. "I know any or all of you would go. Nobody has a chance, but if a plane could be landed close enough—so that a flyer could get in and find out things before the swamp, and the sound, and the red fog terror could break his nerve—you see?"

Strang nodded curtly. The job was made to order for him. He couldn't hear. If he didn't hear the sounds it was as though there were no sounds. And yet—was it not the things one did not understand, that existed yet could neither be seen nor heard, that turned men's hearts to water?

"When do I start, Major?" he snapped.

Howes shivered a little. Outside the far guns rolled. Machine-guns chattered along the Front, just a few miles away.

Strang did not hear the guns, but he had a vivid imagination. Distinctly he could see red fog creeping in under the door. But he realized it was only the shadow of the light, where it touched the darkness of the night on the tarmac.

Was this menace, merely hinted at, some new *Schrecklichkeit*? Often there had been whispers of atrocities. Strang had never believed them. He hated the Germans, but he gave them credit for honor and manhood—if either were worth anything in a war in which men ripped one another to bits for some cause which few of them understood, or asked about.

Howes led the way to his office. Strang felt that he talked as he walked, but all he could see was the broad back of the major. If he were called to task he could say his thoughts had been occupied with the red fog, and what he intended to do about it. But the major either was not talking or didn't care whether the flyer answered.

Howes brought out a map.

"We know damn' little about this area, Strang," he said, looking up into Strang's face as he spoke. "But Intelligence says that *here*, according to aerial photographs taken from a great height, is a group of camouflaged buildings—that *here* may be a spot where a plane can land.

"Understand, Strang, you may be able to land, but you may never have a chance to take off again—and will have to work your way out of the swamp, on foot, and back here the best way you know how."

"I understand, sir," said Strang grimly. "Take off or no, I'll land—and that's the first necessity. If the government doesn't mind the loss of a Spad—"

"They lose Spads every day!" snapped Howes. "Spads can be replaced."

"So can men," said Strang to himself grimly.

HE strode across the tarmac after a swift shake of the major's hand and a grave, "Good luck!" snapped at his back, which he had not heard. And that was lucky—

you wished men luck and they didn't come back. It was well he hadn't heard.

A Spad was turning over at the deadline. Strang tested his instruments, noting that the Spad was the major's own, a trim gray fighting machine, perfect in every detail. He whistled softly to himself.

"It *must* be important," he decided.

He climbed in, goosed the throttle, waved the chocks out, slammed down the field and pushed the ground away with his wheels and his tail-skid.

HE rose to five thousand and headed eastward. Somewhere ahead, seventeen miles away, was a horror which had taken the very souls of at least two men. He wondered what sort of brain had devised the devilish whatever-it-was that had caused the havoc.

His altimeter said twelve thousand as he throttled down and coasted over pencils of flame which came from countless rifles and machine-guns—cables of flame from bigger guns—and was glad for the silence which might prove his salvation.

Who could say that the Fates which held the schemes of the war-gods in their hands had not decreed that he lose his hearing for the purposes of this very task?

He shrugged and scanned the night sky for German planes. He knew he must have been seen or heard, that telephones jangled a warning back of the lines—a warning to watch for a high flying Spad, going eastward alone.

It seemed crazy, unreal, that he felt so peacefully unconcerned about what lay ahead—where reason told him that Hell would be his portion.

"Picking up the pieces for Intelligence—," he caught himself muttering. "We can't give them a chance to laugh at us."

And then he saw the exhaust flames of ships that rose in the night, ahead, to the north, to the south.

He brought the stick back into his belly, rising swiftly to the ceiling of his ship—then held to his course.

CHAPTER III

"Naught Shall Sway This Courier"

HE set his lips firmly. Let those Germans come. Maybe they guessed his mission. Maybe they didn't. It didn't matter. They couldn't stop him. He'd been given a job. He'd do it or bust a gut or something. No heroics about it. You did your job or got killed.

He watched the ships come up, bullet fast. He could feel the determination of the Germans who came to meet him. They wouldn't let him past. One ahead, one to the left, one to the right, still several miles away—mere minutes as ships flew.

That told him something. No flight of squadrons were being sent to stop him, but picked men, probably the best from three different *'staffels'*. The Germans were methodical, thorough. Three picked flyers, probably men with record *descendus*.

He tested out his Vickers, sending the bullets through his prop arc. He couldn't hear the chattering of his guns, but he could feel the trembling of them. He was ready.

He let his gun out a notch, aiming at the plane dead ahead. Some sixth sense told him it was a Fokker, fastest flyer that rode the skies. The Germans would have it on him in everything—except that he couldn't hear; that he could close out everything except his mission; what lay ahead, what lay behind.

He whirled at the last thought and looked back. There were no ships behind or under him.

The Germans must feel sure of

the three they were sending. That meant if he lived that he would reach his objective with frazzled nerves, a bullet-riddled crate and a tired body—cold meat for the terrors of the swamp of mystery. He only shrugged.

All in the night's work.

The Fokker came up with a rush. The pilot was over-eager. Pencils of flame spurted from his guns while he was still out of range. Strang studied his crate, seeking for bullet holes.

He didn't even zig-zag, knowing that only chance would send a bullet into a vital spot at such a range. The enemy was almost dead ahead, but several hundred feet below.

Strang nosed over and slanted down, letting his motor full out. This business he knew. His knees gripped his stick with savage intensity.

HIS thumbs went to the triggers. His eyes were glued to the shadowed ring-sights. The Fokker bulked larger and larger. Strang swore softly, giving grudging admiration to the German who flew straight into the muzzles of his guns.

The German was sure of himself or did not believe in the expertness of his enemy. Now Strang's guns began to tremble again, under his hands.

His tracers spurted into the night and he knew he was shooting high. He saw that it was to be a test of nerve. He wouldn't give ground. Neither, apparently, would the German. But in the end the German would. They were not fools. Only the Yankees were that—fools for personal pride. But it got them through.

The Fokker faltered, then swung back on her course. Strang could feel his ship lose vitality somehow, as a man you are fighting wilts when he has taken a blow that saps his strength.

What had gone? A strut? No, they were all there. Maybe his landing gear. It didn't matter, for he still flew and his prop ticked over, a black blur against the night.

His Vickers purred and did not stop.

Again the Fokker hesitated. Strang dived like a shot, aiming directly at the enemy cockpit. That hesitation, while the German made up his mind whether to maneuver for position or to make an issue of this headlong-meeting engagement, was the Boche's undoing. Strang could almost read his thoughts. If he hesitated the other two would come up, help to rob him of a personal victory.

The German swung back into line, Spandaus penciling the night with orange.

But he was too late. Strang knew that his bullets were smashing into the Fokker cockpit, into the pilot—and he kicked his nose to the left a bit, feeling for the motor of the enemy. In a swift sudden puff the Fokker burst into flames.

In a smashing tableau the Fokker became all red, a ball of fire in the night—and limned against it Strang saw the pilot stand up. The man's right arm hung useless at his side. His left lifted in salute for a brief moment.

THEN the German stepped out of the flaming ball, with his clothing smoking redly, and the night swallowed him, while the wind of his fall erased the flames he had jumped to escape.

"Stout fellow!" said Strang in spite of himself, using the words the British used when they admired a man.

Now Strang looked to right and left, as the Fokker he had destroyed rolled drunkenly, in a red haze of madness, over the sky. He watched embers drop from it—then bigger pieces. A wing detached itself and

fluttered down like a leaf, trailing streamers of red.

Then Strang was over the place where the Fokker had died, or started to die—heading for his objective. He had scarcely swerved from his course, nor would he. The other two were still two miles away, angling in to cut him off. His altimeter said ten thousand feet. He kept his nose down slightly, for greater speed—and held his throttle wide.

The Spad's speed increased. Not knowing how much he had been damaged, he knew his speed was suicidal, but he must hold it. Those two could destroy him.

LUCK must ride his wings. And there was the future. Suppose he accomplished his purpose, how could he win back with a crippled ship, even if he could take off from the heart of the swamp?

Half an hour passed. Ahead, almost under him, he could make out the vast wooded area. He thought he could see moonlight glittering on water, but wasn't sure. The two Fokkers were closing on him from behind.

But he didn't turn back. His flyer's sense told him where to look for the spot which Howes had shown him on the map. He dived for it, putting his nose down as the Fokkers opened fire. He looked back to see pencils of orange from their guns, snapping at him like rubber bands of flame.

He rocked his ship from side to side, making himself a hard target.

He looked back to the Front. Down under him he saw something he had not seen before, flowing, *floating*, across the treetops—a red something, like an emanation from some evil tarn made visible.

His lips shaped the words of fear: "Red fog!"

He could sense the bullets snap-

ping about his ears when he saw the spots of light suddenly show below and knew that flashlights were signaling. Not to him, he knew, but to the two on his tail.

He looked back. The two Fokkers were edging away to either hand. Those dots and dashes had signaled them to cease firing. Grimly he stared back as the Fokker pilots gave the guns to their crates.

The Fokkers, while he warily watched them, eased up on either side of him, but well away, so that they could slip to safety from his guns if he turned on them.

That told him something, too. They were chary of him because, while they were now under orders not to fire, he was not. He could fire upon them without return.

Strang wondered what was in the woods down there. Why had the two ceased firing? Why had the three been sent after him at all if he were to be allowed to fly free in the end? There was fear in what the questions suggested. He thought again of the two agents—the suicide and the lunatic—and shivered.

THERE would be a reception committee waiting for him. They would be on hand when he landed. They would know his altitude, how long it would take to set his wheels down. He picked out his spot for landing. Split seconds would count. He must land before they expected him.

He aimed his nose at the spot in the darkness where he knew he *must* touch his wheels—and went down in a flashing, roaring power dive.

But in spite of everything, in spite of the fact that he flew in a vast, abysmal silence, fear rode his flashing, quivering wings. What sort of a horror awaited him down there?

It did not fear him, that he knew, else it would have left him to the

mercy of the two who would have surely slain him—for he had realized, in the brief period when they had fired upon him, that both were masters of their Fokkers.

Those flashing dots and dashes must have said:

"Leave him to us. There is nothing we fear from him."

He saw the landing place under him, looked back and saw the two Fokkers circling.

They would be waiting—just in case he did not land, or having landed, took off again.

CHAPTER IV

Souls in Torment

THE American realized what a task he had set himself! To go into the darkness of the swamp, where he must depend on his feet and his eyes and his fingers to lead him—without his ears. With his ears there was madness; without them he might well be lost. Roaring monsters could descend on him in the darkness and he would not hear. He was between the devil and the deep sea and he knew it.

Down he went, drawing speed and more speed from his crate. They wouldn't expect him to land so fast. They would time him and he must beat their time, land, and escape from the landing place to do whatever seemed necessary about the red fog.

Already he was reconciled to the loss of his Spad. That it would remain undiscovered was unbelievable. He had been spotted and whoever ran things in the swamp knew why he was here now, diving down with the speed of a falling star to a problematical landing.

Now, staring through the gloom, he could make out a white scar in the face of the swamp. That was the spot, he realized. Whether there were

tree stumps on it, or it was pock-marked with holes, there was no way of knowing. He must run the risk.

He'd go down under full power, pull his nose up, pray to keep his wings, and go down in as flat a pancake as he could. One thing he must be able to do when he landed: Walk away from his crate.

The wind of his dive pushed him back against the rear of his pit. The wind felt like a hard wall against which he pushed his face. Now he could see the creeping stuff down there, moving into the clearing where he must land.

If the red fog were the brain-destroying stuff he had been led to believe, the enemy was trying to destroy him without the slightest danger to themselves, by sending the crimson terror to meet his landing Spad. Could he hold his breath until he could quit the pit and escape?

Down with a sweeping roar, then up and over. His wings all but left their sockets, but somehow held, coddled by his sure hands at the stick, his sure feet on the rudder-bar. Strang himself knew that probably not a flying member of the Ninth could have pulled that ship out after such a dive.

UP and over, a short, snappy loop—a wriggling twist, a flapping of the rudder to cut air speed, and his wheels struck. The plane bounded—straight into the advancing wall of red, which looked red even in the darkness, as though its heart were infinite particles of crimson light.

The plane bounced again, slewed around. Strang held his breath. A coolness touched his forehead as he dived into the red fog. He expected to feel the bite of some awful gas, but his body seemed unharmed by it.

The plane stopped at last. Looming dead ahead was a wall of trees.

He was out of the ship, hesitating a moment as to whether to fire it. But he decided not to take the time.

He cut the motor—to discover something that filled him at once with terror: The awful speed of his dive had righted the evil a stray bullet had done to him in this morning's dog-fight, and he could hear again!

IT was blurred, crazy hearing, but sounds were audible. And he blamed the indistinct quality of his hearing on the fact that he had been flying, that the pressure of his dive had done something to his eardrums.

"I'm like the two agents," he mused—and without rhyme or reason he burst into wild, savage laughter. The laughter was joyous, yet he did not know at what he laughed.

He thrust out his hands, trying to lay hold of the impalpable red stuff that rolled over the clearing in a sullen crimson blanket. He had an absurd desire to go running about in it, like a child dashing about in the first snowstorm, grabbing at the drifting white flakes.

"Those two must have experienced that, too," he told himself.

It took all his will-power to force his legs to carry him away to the left. But when he once started, laughing and choking, he ran swiftly, surely.

In a minute or two he left the fog, entered the darkness—and oddly enough it was as though he traveled from darkness into light. Ten feet beyond the red fog he stopped, gasping, and looked back.

He could not see his plane. He could see only a portion of the clearing. The red fog seemed to have cut the clearing squarely in two. Here where he was it was black—yonder that strange, awful red.

"If I hadn't been warned," he suppressed a desire to laugh again, "I

would say I had already gone mad—and that way madness *does* lie."

Back over him flooded all the horror he had known during the past ghastly weeks, when every chattering Vickers and Spandau had been like fire against his raw nerves; when every distant booming big gun had been a monster approaching to destroy him.

"Howes must have guessed," he thought, "yet he chose me. Maybe he knew, and chose me, hoping I would whip it. If my ears hadn't betrayed me a second time maybe I would have. Now—well—I must anyhow."

What direction must he take to find the source of the fog? What must he do when he found it? If one desired to know whence a stream of water came, one followed it to its source—and the same must apply to the red fog, he reasoned.

A tentacle of the red fog whipped out at him as though it had been a sentient being; but he fought it off and dashed aside to escape the red stuff—to find himself in darkness again, laughing and sobbing.

Never, if he ever returned to the front on his own side of the lines, would any noise of battle so affect him as all this. If he escaped this, sane, the war would be a picnic afterward.

HE moved to the very edge of the clearing and paralleled the red fog, and against his eardrums, as though it had been tiny hammers pounding, sounded the Noise.

It was a queer noise that at first did not seem annoying. It was like the monotonous thumping of a piston on a locomotive, but the danger of listening to it lay in the fact that its sound was a measured, never-varying tempo. Coupled with the horror of the red fog, the effect was maddening—and he knew that not yet had

he experienced all that this evil sector had to show him.

Now he came to the edge of the clearing, and ahead of him stretched the black appalling blanket of the woods. In those woods who could tell what terrors lurked? In them, one man had gone to his doom in a quagmire. In it another man had lost his reason, but had escaped in the end—babbling of the sound and the red fog.

STRANG'S nerve stiffened. When he wished to laugh, he strangled the laughter in his throat, knowing it the effect of faint fingers of the red fog in his brain—for inside his head he could feel the fingers questing, wrapping themselves about his brain's convolutions like tiny serpents.

He plunged into the woods. He must take care to parallel the flat column of red fog. By the map, those camouflaged buildings to which Howes had referred were some two miles away.

Why hadn't Intelligence ordered the place destroyed by direct attack from the air with bombs? He knew the answer to that. This place must be protected as nothing else in Germany was protected, for if the red fog were turned on the Allies it would mean the end of the war.

So squadrons and squadrons of planes must surround the swamp to protect the crimson secret. That was the answer. And the pilots would never be sure that all the paraphernalia had been destroyed.

The destruction must be complete, together with—

He gasped.

"The brains behind the horror must be removed from ability to work harm!" he decided. "So I'm here on a mission of murder, too!"

But when he weighed the murder

of one German in cold blood, or even a hundred, against the lives of thousands of American, British and French soldiers, he did not mind. It would not lie heavily on his conscience.

And, he must learn how the red fog was controlled.

Still the beating, beating, of that sound against his eardrums. It reminded him somewhat of the sullen sound of sirens on a fog-bound river. It reminded him of tom-toms. It reminded him of muffled drumbeats in a funeral cortege. Yet it was like none of these, though it possessed a little of them all.

Branches of trees tore at his face and his clothing. His hands were scratched and bleeding. He squinted his eyes to protect them.

Now and again his feet seemed to hover over nothingness. Now and again they touched something soft, and sticky, while his nostrils were assailed by the odor of quagmires.

When he sensed the presence of sure death ahead of him, under him, below his feet, he had a wild desire to rise in a great leap ahead, to clear obstruction.

BUT reason guided him and he stepped back instead, so as not to plunge into the quicksands he knew were directly ahead. Carefully, he circled such quicksands, tearing his clothing on the branches and twigs. He felt blood trickling down his cheeks.

He fought off the desire to laugh when, having circled some hidden danger, sensed rather than seen, he again approached the floating area of red fog.

The further he penetrated the woods, the louder and more insistent became the Noise—that indeterminate sound which he could not characterize, save that its tempo and its substance never changed. He felt like

ripping at his hair and his cheeks with tearing fingernails, but he set his teeth against his desire and hurried toward the sound.

Strange, he thought, that no one came for him. Why were they not scouring the woods for him? Maybe they thought the red fog had got him when he landed. Maybe they knew that the swamp would claim him, or the sound drive him mad.

He stopped in surprise.

UNDER his feet was a corduroy road leading to the west. He had broken out upon it unexpectedly, in the midst of darkness deeper than any yet experienced in this hell—for above the narrow road which bridged the swamp, the limbs of trees were a matted, impenetrable growth. Not even the moon could thrust her silver fingers through. Not even the sun could have managed to peer through—save in tiny spots—during the day.

It was no wonder that no aerial photographs had shown this road. Yet Intelligence must have guessed its existence. That explained why the camouflaged buildings had not been bombed. The workers in them would be warned long before the bombers arrived—and escape for all hands was possible by this road.

Besides, such a bombing might bring down on the heads of the Allies the very horror they wished to avert, by forcing the hands of the enemy.

No wonder only one man had been given the task!

The very fear of Allied Intelligence had been, so far, the greatest protection of the buildings in the swamp.

And now, even as Strang pondered his next move, two monster eyes glowed suddenly in the darkness ahead—and to his ears came the slow beating of truck motors, on huge

vehicles traveling as slowly as possible to keep down the noise.

As a further aid in the silent movement of the two-eyed monsters, the Noise grew in volume, dead ahead.

Strang stepped into the darkness off the road and watched the truck move past. He noted that the body of the truck was a huge drum which looked like a mighty, evilly distended toad. It required little imagination to know what that drum contained.

The red fog, imprisoned like some awful beast, was on the move to the Front!

How many of the drums were traveling?

There was no way of telling—but now, back down the road, stretching away and away to the north, he saw many other eyes, two by two, coming out of the gloom to the sound of the Noise—in ghastly black single file.

Here was the red fog!

The next move must be Strang's—and he found himself helpless in the grip of terror such as he had never known before.

CHAPTER V

The Lone Destroyer

WHO would not have been held in the grip of unimaginable terror? Even the angels would have been terror-stricken, watching those two-eyed monsters go rolling through the abysmal depths of the evil swamp, realizing whither they went.

There in those squat toad-like drums went madness for thousands, maybe millions of men, who could thus be turned on one another to their mutual destruction.

Only one man's hands held the remotest chance of doing anything to prevent it. But how?

On that first truck to roll past there had been three men in *pickelhaube*

helmets, one who drove and two grim ones who held bayoneted rifles in their hands.

Strang knew what would happen to him if he were seen. The headlights had failed to pick him out, else right now he would have been dead, riddled with bullets.

YET if he were to do anything with all this trundling destruction he must not only subdue the three on that first truck, but the three which rode the long convoy that stretched back and back—to the place where the red fog was made.

Now came the second truck, but he must avoid it. He stepped back into the woods, taking the greatest risks he had ever taken so far. He ran, paralleling the road, taking tall chances on the quagmires, to overtake that first truck. What he would do when he encountered it he did not know.

The circumstances themselves must look after that.

He stepped into mudholes but traveled too rapidly through them for them to grip and hold him fast.

He saw that first truck ahead and laid his plans. He was in uniform, the uniform of an American flyer. If he showed himself he would be shot. If he used the automatic which he carried the sound would carry to the others; might arouse unknown numbers of guardians of the red fog scattered through the swamp in undreamed of coigns of vantage.

He reached the truck and clung to hand holds he could find on the squat drum of red fog—which he now knew to be merely the latest gas invention, possessed of neither mystery or surprise to him. It would be a mystery and surprise to the Allies, though, until it was too late to do anything about it.

By the same token it would have the same effect on Germans who

were not somehow protected against it.

And then the solution came.

He pulled himself up on the drum, eyes glued to the three broad backs ahead of him. He drew his automatic. He slipped off his flying jacket as best he could, praying that no overhanging tree limb throw him from the tank. The second truck was far back, where its lights would not be likely to pick him out.

This was his chance if ever he were to have one. He slipped the automatic into the folds of his coat, making a hole for it big enough to prevent any fouling of the slide when it jumped to throw out empty cartridge cases and to hur! fresh ones into the breach.

Now he was right over the three men when one of them, sensing his presence, half turned—and the automatic spoke so softly he never heard it nor knew what hit him. He topped sidewise against the man in the center, who commented gruffly in German:

"Stay awake, Jacob. We haven't really started yet. If the commandant knew you slept so much—"

BUT the speaker got no further, for the automatic spoke again. It was awful, this shooting men in the back, but it was worse to turn friends against one another to make them destroy each other and themselves. No, these men must die, and Strang must live, which meant he must slay with as little danger to himself as humanly possible.

His automatic spoke a third time before the muffled report of the second shot had died away—so quickly that the two shots came almost as one, and the driver dived off the seat and vanished into the swamp, his legs and arms asprawl.

Then Strang automatically sentenced himself to a German firing

squad by slipping into the upper coat of one of the dead men—doing this even as he slid behind the wheel of the monster and braked it to a stop. Now he jumped down and hurried to the rear of the truck. He knew he had but a few minutes. He must work the very fastest he knew how. Events were shaping themselves to his ends.

HIS guess, however, must be correct, or he was a fugitive who could expect nothing whatever but the bullets of the firing squad. Suppose the trucks did not contain the red fog, then what?

But he was so sure on that point. He was sorry he had not listened for speech on the part of the truck's crew. They might have given him a hint.

Now he ran his fingers over the rear end of the great drum. There was a flaring nozzle spout, with a stopcock attached. His fingers told him that he could turn it by a touch. He glanced back down the road, where the eyes, two by two, were beginning to appear.

Much depended on what those in the rear did about things. He studied the road. By dint of great care two trucks might pass on it. The trucks were powerful things, capable of great speed—and that was in his favor in its turn.

Now he was ready. He wished his German were better.

The truck in the rear slowed down, stopped, and a voice yelled at him. Now Strang was busy with the wheels of the truck, as though seeking to see what had made it stop. Here was the usual reason for a convoy; that all crews could help one truck in case it stalled.

Strang had counted on this.

"What's wrong? Can you manage it yourself?"

He yelled back for the others to go

to hell, that he would be rolling again in a matter of seconds. As he expected, and hoped for, no one jumped down from that second truck to come to his aid. One by one, the trucks next in the rear came sliding up, breaking to a stop behind the second, and on back and back, until it seemed the eyes stretched to infinity through the leafy tunnel.

From either side came the odors of the swamp, dank and palpable, like emanations from some evil mausoleum. The fog of the swamp, the gray-white stuff, rolled across the road between the trucks—ghost shrouds of sorts, suggesting all manner of evil things. It masked in some small measure the half-uniform of Allan Strang, lieutenant in Uncle Sam's air forces. Men in this swamp, it seemed, needed all sorts of masks for their deeds of terror.

Looking back, he knew that all the trucks in this convoy had come to a stop, radiator to tailgate. He estimated that there were fully a score of them.

HE darted behind the truck and his hand went to the stopcock. It spun swiftly under his fingers, even as the three on the next truck back, suddenly suspecting something, and knowing the meaning of the opening of that grim stopcock, shouted at Strang.

A rifle was swung up to a shoulder and a bullet sped into the night.

But there was only one bullet, for now the red fog hosed from the nozzle, spreading out into a fan because of the funnel shape of the faucet, constructed to fit this very purpose, and in an instant the truck back there was covered, inundated, by the red fog.

"Pray God my self-control is better than theirs," said Allan Strang fervently.

He stood beside that awful nozzle

whence came the red fog, roaring, and the sound of its going was the Noise he had heard—as though inside the squat drum a monster stirred and stirred, fighting his imprisonment within the tank.

IT was as though the monster had feet that were shod with iron that kept knocking against the sides of the tank—and out of it poured the horrid crimson which took the Germans by surprise.

And to Strang's ears came evil sounds—the sounds of choked, cruel, maniacal laughter, together with the sound of blows struck savagely. He heard bodies thud to the corduroy, but could not see them—and knew that the tendrils of red fog he had experienced were penetrating the brains of the Germans.

He knew that now the diabolical red gas poured back over all the trucks.

He heard the yelling, muffled and choked—in the midst of laughter—of men in mortal, crazed combat. God, how this stuff worked! If it had been turned against the Allies!

Dimly, at intervals, he could see those eyes, two by two. Now and again he could see blurred, reddish figures, against the lights. Some fought hand to hand—some battled with bayonets, ripping at bodies, at throats and faces.

Horror possessed him, but he was not yet through.

He hurried to the seat of his own truck, started the motor. He backed swiftly, a foot or two; backed again, straightened his wheels, backed, went forward, doing the impossible—impossible save to a flyer who could send a Spad through a needle's eye, or land it in a swamp.

Now he was facing back the way the truck had come.

And there the madmen still fought.

He smashed toward the Germans

at top speed. If only there were time to drop off and turn the nozzle on each truck, but he dared not wait. The whole organization of the convoy would be on him.

It was a mad drive, for now he was in the red fog he had released, though mercifully he rode high above it and it was thinning—but its evilness possessed him just the same, and he laughed wildly, and when men, fighting men, got in his way, he rode them down, laughing.

But he laughed through tears for the horror of it, the necessity for such behavior—and drove on.

AND now he was past the last of the trucks—and traveling at top speed through the thinning red fog, heading back to the place whence all of it had come—and he fought to stay his mad laughter, to defeat the creeping tendrils of the crimson gas which moved into his nostrils in spite of his attempts to keep from breathing it in.

He left the fighting Germans behind. They had killed many of their own kind. Some would stay sane, but it would be some time before they could follow him.

He came to a quadrangle of buildings. The garages for the trucks he recognized at once. Near the far end he saw a Fokker pursuit plane, with idle motor. He marked it, hoping it held gas. Then his eyes sought among the other buildings for the one which might be that which he must find.

It wasn't difficult to find—for the building was made of some gray-white substance, like thick glass, through which he could see the reddish glow of the fog. There was the master container.

Scores of men were racing toward him, shouting, when he headed the truck for that building and gave her full gun.

He waited until the last second.

The running Germans raced for the truck, to head it off. To them he was just a German gone berserk. They didn't see his disguise in the excitement. He hit the ground running toward the Fokker, just as the truck smashed into the glass-like building at full speed.

It was a mighty crash, and then the billowing red fog, and the Noise of its escape, possessed the quadrangle—and out of the red smother rose the shouts and curses, and then the laughter, of fighting men.

Strang reached the Fokker, holding his breath, and spun the prop after looking swiftly, madly, at the instruments. The propeller caught.

He gained the pit with a great bound just as the red fog rolled over the ship. He knew his direction as he fed the crate the gun. His lungs were close to bursting from holding his breath. He dared not wait for the motor to warm. Only up above the red fog was there safety, and sanity.

HE almost jumped the Fokker off the quadrangle, missing one of the garages by the merest accident.

Then his breath went from him in a great explosion and he looked down on a vast growing mushroom which spread and spread, and rose—and billowed out in all directions over the swamp.

The stream of red gas which had poured out toward his plane was broken off when his truck crashed the master container. But that didn't matter now, for in an hour all the swamp would be possessed by the red death.

And, so brief had been his journey through red hell, the two Fokkers who had drawn away from him when he dived in, still circled the place—and now were edging toward him to investigate this Fokker from out of the crimson mushroom.

He laughed. He leaned forward. His teeth were bared. He pushed against the front of the pit, as he tested out his Spandaus, as though to urge his Fokker to greater and greater speed.

CHAPTER VI

The Peace of Battle

IT WAS as though he awakened from a nightmare, gloriously happy to find it untrue. But now he could look down into the red mushroom which was still growing, and see that it had been true after all. In a few minutes he would be free of the crimson incubus—and a fight with two of the enemy, in the approved fashion, would help blow away the shreds and remnants of the nightmare.

Those two pilots knew him for what he was by the simple process of reasoning it out. They had seen him go down. They had looked down upon the destruction of the plant of red gas—and then had seen the Fokker come up through the mushroom. It was almost as though the Fokker had been placed just there for his use.

He wondered about the Fokker, how it came to be there, and peered over the side, staring at the insignia on the fuselage—and gasped. On the sides of the Fokker were the Imperial Crowns of Germany.

Some member of a German royal family had come to the quadrangle to watch the departure of the grim convoy—and to fly over the lines afterward, perhaps, to see what resulted among the Allies when the red fog was released.

Now, the owner of this Fokker, who ever he was, had been caught in his own trap. He had been swallowed by the stuff as he had expected to see others swallowed by it.

Allan Strang straightened in his

pit. His Spandaus chattered in a test burst—and the sound of the guns was music to his ears.

He dashed straight at the two Fokkers whose pilots were not loath to come to combat. They could do nothing now about what he had done to keep Germany from winning the war.

The most they could do was to slay the man who had foiled the terror of the red fog.

ALLAN STRANG knew that he faced the two most desperate flyers in all Germany, for they were pilots who would gladly give their lives for one burst through his back.

The three sets of Spandaus began chattering together as three flyers plunged at one another like three men gone mad with the lust to slay.

Allan Strang saw one pilot in his ring-sights, and he rode the man's taut back until bullets from the Spandaus of the second were whipping all about him—rode him until he knew that his bullets were going home.

The Fokker nosed up, spinning on the axis of its own fuselage by some frantic twist given to the controls by the feet and hands of a flyer already dead. Then the Fokker fell away and went plunging down the sky, motor revving up to the limit—and Allan Strang turned on the last of his enemies as the red fog swallowed the Fokker, hugging it close, taking it down to the evil bosom of the swamp.

It took two minutes for him to blast the second Fokker down, and when he had done it his own ship was a wreck and he had no landing gear—for as a last desperate resort, he had dragged his landing gear through the tail assembly of the enemy.

Now he banked for home, knowing that the hand of every enemy would be against him, and the

hand of every friend because he flew a German plane.

Archies flowered for him over the lines. Nicuports and Spads plunged at him and he avoided them, laughing, with all his consummate skill.

Above his own drome, where planes at the deadline were running out to come up and engage him, he turned his nose down and plunged for the field. He had no wheels. It didn't matter in the least that he hadn't.

Spinning down, while the ground crews hurled lead at him from bracketed Brownings, he grinned to himself, foreseeing the mess he would make when he landed.

He leveled off, stalled, fish-tailed, cut his switch to keep from burning, and tried to slide his Fokker along the ground.

It struck—and he regained consciousness to see the squadron medico bending over him. When Strang opened his eyes the medico shook his head.

“YOU came through fairly well, Strang,” he said. “But there's a wound on your head—I'm afraid it will affect your hearing—”

Strang grinned.

Two days later he reported at the deadline, to Major Howes.

“You don't really have to go up, Strang,” said the major. “You've done enough for two wars twice as long as this one. The whole world knows what you did—and every flyer in Germany will be after your scalp.”

Strang did not answer for a moment. He looked away toward the east, toward Germany. Then he met the eyes of Major Howes, his own very grave.

“I don't mind, sir,” he said, quietly. “Let them come—for they will come with clean bullets, to the glorious chattering of Spandaus. There, sir, is a man's way to die, and I don't fear it in the least.”

Rubber Comes High



A shriek burst from Salazar as his shoulder snapped, and the gun fell from his nerveless fingers

A Swift-Moving Story of Pulse-Stirring Combat in the Rubber Jungles of the Amazon Valley

By I. P. HOLMES

Author of "Christmas Comes to Big Muddy," etc.

IT WAS the fitful light, thrown by the smelly, soot-blackened kerosene lamp that hung from the murky ceiling of the cantina, which told Cleve Morley that he

was not a split second away from death.

The lamp was above and behind Cleve and now much of its light was blocked out by a dark shadow which

spread across the table at which Cleve was eating. Distorted though the shadow was, Cleve identified it. It was the shadow of a man, a man with arm upraised, an arm tipped with eighteen inches of poised steel.

Ten years spent in the rubber camps of the Amazon Valley had taught Cleve Morley one sure rule of self-preservation. Act first and explain later. He lived up to that rule now.

The cup of scalding hot coffee he was in the act of sipping was flung over his left shoulder as he threw himself out of his chair to the right.

On hands and knees Cleve scuttled across the damp, earthen floor of the place, to where another chair stood empty. Here he jerked himself erect, whirling—at the same time swinging the chair high.

SPRAWLED half across the table Cleve had just quitted, was the bulky figure of an up-river Indian, stringy black hair fringed above an evil, snarling face.

Beady, hate-filled eyes blinked through the dregs of the coffee Cleve had thrown, and one dirty, claw-like hand wrestled with the haft of the knife that had been intended for Cleve's heart. For the blade of the knife, driven hard, had buried half its length in the table top.

With one hand the would-be assassin wiped his eyes clear, and a savage jerk of the other freed the knife. Then, snarling a guttural curse, the Indian circled the table and advanced toward Cleve.

He was a powerful simian-like brute, very dark, with long, gorilla arms that swung almost to his flexed knees. His only garment was a pair of filthy, tattered cotton pants, above the waist-line of which bulked his hairy torso.

In that flashing moment of inspec-

tion, Cleve identified him as being at least part Minari, with some evidence of Negro blood in his make-up. A breed—and a dangerous one.

"Far enough," barked Cleve in river dialect, a combination of Spanish, Portuguese and Indian. "Back up, before I knock you back."

The knife-wielder's answer was a swift, slithering leap, which carried him within striking distance. The fellow had the deceptive speed of movement of one of the cat tribe. He crouched low, dodging to the side, while whipping his knife around in a flat, gleaming circle.

Had Cleve stayed put, that vicious blade would have ripped his body wide open. But Cleve had witnessed knife duels in the squalid river towns before, and he knew some of the tactics to expect. On at least one occasion he had seen that ripping, circling, slash stroke literally disembowel an unfortunate.

Now, as he saw his assailant duck his bullet head as a first involuntary move, Cleve side-stepped swiftly. At that, the incredible length of the fellow's arm proved near disaster, for the point of the reaching blade slit the loose folds of Cleve's khaki shirt and burned its way across the skin.

THE bite of the steel unleashed a wave of savagery in Cleve himself. Balanced on his toes, he swung the heavy, rattan chair with all his strength. It crashed down across the head and shoulders of the knife-wielder, sending the brute to the floor in a heap.

At this, a tense, menacing snarl filled the smoky, dirty little room. Edging in through the open doorway came several more river rats, depraved off-scourings of a thousand stagnant back-waters.

The rubber jungles of the Amazon Valley spawn many evil things—

poison plants, poison snakes and vicious men, men who would kill and kill again for a few miserable *milreis*. In those lowering visages, in the guttural, feral snarl they voiced, Cleve Morley read an animal-like hunger for his life.

His lean, hardship toughened body grew taut and poised, his gray eyes chill. There was no fear in his mind, but there was lightning thought, a cold balancing of his chances.

ONE thing he knew. To win free he had to act quickly, before any coherent plan of offense could come to the threatening crowd. And at that, utter darkness offered his only chance of freedom. In the light, no matter how valiantly he battled, he could not avoid all of the knife thrusts which would be directed his way.

So he stepped forward and swung the chair again, smashing the hanging lamp to a thousand fragments.

Blackness, like a thick, stifling blanket, filled the place. Through it, thrown with all Cleve's power, the chair went hurtling, crashing into the crowd that choked the door. And after it, swinging both fists, went Cleve Morley.

He went low, in a driving run reminiscent of a full-back bucking a football line. His reaching arms found a pair of thighs, and he swung the squalling, bewildered peon up and over his back, where the fellow hung as a partial shield. Cleve held him there, while he kicked and butted his way along.

The place was a bedlam. Howls of anger, curses, shrieks of agony and fear arose. Cleve knew well the psychology of the river peon. As one of a group, with light to aid him, and with a common object of attack, the peon was a deadly, vicious fighter. But he was easily subject to panic and bewilderment.

So it was now. In the black, cloying darkness, with everything a wild, moiling tangle, not knowing who was friend or who was foe, what had threatened to become a group charge changed in a twinkling to an individual brawl, where each one struck out blindly, thinking only of saving his own worthless skin.

Knives were at work, and men died there in the hot, fetid night, with the dank river air biting in their panting throats.

Cleve wasted neither time nor strength in aimless conflict. He had but one objective, to win free beyond the confines of the door. So he still held his crouch, burrowing through the stinking, sweating press of bodies.

He still clung to the legs of the man who flopped and writhed across his back and shoulders. In a brawl of this kind, where knives were swinging, it was good to have the thickness of another body to act as a buffer to one's own.

Suddenly Cleve's burden shrieked wildly, then quieted to a choking gurgle, and hung limp and supine. A knife that would have found Cleve's vitals had taken the fellow's life.

CLEVE let go of the lifeless legs and put all his strength into a final lunge. It practically cleared him, but there was something just ahead that spat fury and invective like an enraged cat. Cleve put his shoulder behind a driving punch, his fist dug home, and the something fell away. Cleve was free.

Down the narrow, evil-smelling street Cleve loped, hailing with relief the pale, twisting, miasmatic river mists as they closed about him. He was panting with effort and sweat stung his eyes, but a grim laugh of satisfaction came from him.

There was a peculiar gratification

in having pitted one's strength and swift thinking against death and danger and to have won from both.

For there was no pursuit and there would be none. At least not for that night.

THE mass spirit of the river rats was broken and there would be a dozen personal conflicts among themselves as an outcome to that wild shambles about the doorway of the cantina.

By the time these were settled, Cleve Morley would be miles away up-river.

The river town of Correia was small, and Cleve soon reached the limits of it. He had slowed his pace to a walk and his alert eyes stabbed the night. On his right loomed the low rounded outline of a mud and wattle hut. Before the open door Cleve paused and whistled softly, a cadence of three notes, high, than low, then high again.

There was a stir from within and an eager voice sounded. "*Señor* Cleve. What is it?"

"We leave for camp immediately, Luis. Salazar did not show up and I'm not going to wait for him. Something is rotten in Denmark. A bunch of peons just tried their best to cut my throat. Why, I haven't the least idea. But I'm not giving them a second chance—not this trip anyhow. Did you get the petrol on board?"

A figure emerged from the hut. "*Si, Señor.* All is ready."

Together they went down a sloping path to where the waters of the mighty Amazon lapped restlessly at the mud bank. Here was a tiny, rickety landing stage built of poles and to the outer end of it was tied Cleve's launch. They got aboard and, while Cleve bent over the motor, Luis cast off.

Overhead a night bird screamed

with shrill discordance. Somewhere out along the river sounded the bel-lowing challenge of a lurking jaguare. Insect life droned about.

Then the motor of the launch surged into life, muddy foam churned about the stern and the craft nosed its way out until the push of the current struck it fairly. Cleve spun the wheel until the sturdy bow met the current head-on, and the dim lights of Correia fell astern.

Daylight found Cleve Morley and Luis, his faithful henchman, far up-river from Correia. They had stood watch and watch, one steering while the other slept. Now, as the gray light of day filtered down through the river mists, Cleve had the wheel and Luis, a lithe, swarthy, intelligent looking native, was preparing a frugal breakfast.

During his watches at the wheel, Cleve had done a lot of thinking. There was something behind that unprovoked attack in the cantina. Cleve knew his river people and had little trouble in getting along with them in the past.

HE knew when to be stern and when to be cheerful and the important knack of holding their respect. Many times before had he been in Correia, for his business as rubber buyer took him to all the river towns.

A score of times he had eaten in the identical cantina, with never any trouble beyond the subduing of an occasional native who had imbibed too heavily of the cheap and fiery *aguardiente*.

But that attack of the night before had been a concerted one, with a score of men apparently intent on sticking a knife into his vitals. Someone had planned that thing—given orders, probably offered a reward, for money talks in the river

dives of the Amazon Valley as it does in dives the world over.

Cleve was sensible enough to realize that in the ten years he had put in along the river he had made some enemies. This was inevitable. Cleve had been more than passably successful in his business and this success had caused envy among men of lesser energy and ability. And envy is but a step away from dislike and dislike but a palm spread from hate.

AT the same time, murder, especially hired murder, generally calls for some deeper motive than mere dislike, or even hate. Money was the actuating force possessing the greatest potency. Who would benefit financially from his death?

Cleve mulled this question at length over his frugal breakfast of scalding, syrupy coffee, hard biscuit and jam. But no satisfactory conclusion came of it.

His thoughts turned to Salazar. Why had Salazar failed to show up? It was the powerful up-river rubber dealer who had suggested the meeting. They had met before, Cleve and Salazar, to talk over business deals.

Sometimes, from such conferences, would come a hot tip of a supply of high grade, smoke cured rubber in some distant Indian camp, the securing of which would reap both of them a handsome profit. Not that Cleve and Salazar were partners in any sense of the word. But their business interests were more or less mutual.

Salazar seldom left the river himself. With his little, creaky, battered old power scow, he transported most of the up-river rubber down to Manaus, where it was transferred to the warehouses or the holds of the ocean-going freighters. But inside the bullet-head of the man was a certain cunning when it

came to making money, and he overlooked few bets.

Then there was Trenholm, an Englishman, whose business activities were a great deal like Cleve's. They were field men, the ones who delved deep into the trackless jungle forests, seeking out the camps of shy and often more or less hostile Indian tribes to trade with them for rubber.

Cleve knew Trenholm well, and liked him. A quiet, tanned, level-eyed man—a good companion and a square shooter. It was impossible to attach any suspicion on Trenholm. He simply wasn't that type of individual.

Cleve shook his head. The question was beyond him.

At sunup, the launch nosed into the confluence of the Rio Purus with the parent stream. Some ten leagues up the Rio Purus was Cleve's permanent camp. He'd go back to his regular business of gathering rubber and let the future answer the present riddle. Salazar would show up in a week or two and tell why he had not kept the rendezvous at Correia.

WITH the rising of the sun, the smoking mists were gone and sweltering heat bathed the river and jungle. Roused by the mutter of the launch's exhaust, ducks lifted and whipped away. Long-legged cranes launched themselves from mud flats and drifted off on ungainly wings. Parakeets and toucans twittered and shrieked discordantly. A howler monkey boomed from some distant jungle retreat. The turgid water coiled past like molten copper.

Luis, perched on the bow, exclaimed suddenly: "*Señor*—a canoe adrift. And, *Dios!* There is someone in it—*asleep or dead!*"

Cleve stood up, shading his eyes against the glare of the waters. The

canoe, a crude dugout, showed almost straight ahead, turning slowly and aimlessly with the whip of the current. And hanging limply over one gunwale was a human forearm.

Cleve spun the wheel slightly. "We'll go alongside and have a look," he said. "Grab hold as we come up to it."

THE launch slid smoothly up and Luis leaned out and caught the trailing painter of twisted liana. As he straightened up, he gasped. "Jesus Maria Santissima! It is Señor Trenholm. He lies in his blood like a dead man!"

Cleve stiffened and something caught at his throat. Trenholm—good old Trenholm—dead! He left the wheel, leaped to Luis' side.

"Take the wheel," he snapped. "I'll handle this."

Muttering, crossing himself, patting a prayer, Luis handed Cleve the painter and scrambled back to the wheel. Cleve looked into the canoe and his heart sank. It was Trenholm, right enough.

The trader lay, his face to the sky, his right arm outflung across the gunwale and trailing limply. His khakis were torn, covered with mud and blood. Seeping out below the point of his right shoulder a pool of carmine was slowly blackening under the glare of the sun.

Yet, even as Cleve looked down at him, Trenholm moaned very softly and his body twitched.

Cleve caught his breath in a gasp of relief. He rasped swift orders at Luis. "Cut off the motor. Come here and help me. He's alive—thank God!"

Between them they got Trenholm into the launch and onto the narrow bunk in the tiny cabin, where Cleve stripped off the tattered shirt and sent Luis scuttling about for clean water and bandages.

Trenholm's torso showed several wounds, the most serious of which was a bullet hole through his right shoulder. There were several surface wounds, but none of these were deep enough to cause anything but some loss of blood.

Carefully Cleve worked, washing, smearing with antiseptic ointment from his medicine kit, and finally bandaging firmly. This done, he bathed Trenholm's face and edged first water, then a sip or two of brandy between the unconscious lips.

The brandy soon had its effect. Trenholm's eyelids fluttered and lifted. For a moment he stared about him blankly. Then his eyes cleared of their vague mists. He smiled crookedly.

"This amazes me, old top," he murmured. "I rather imagined I was done for. Tell me, is it any use?"

"Rather," answered Cleve heartily. "You're due for a siege in the hospital at Manaos, but you'll pull through handily. How did it happen?"

"Salazar—the murdering, double-crossing scum. He tied up at my camp last night. I had him in to tiffin. While he held my attention, one of his thugs came up behind me and tried to stick a knife in me.

I DUCKED far enough aside so he did not get me squarely. Then we had a devil of a brawl. Both Salazar and his man came for me with knives. I finally beat them off and made a run for it. Salazar pulled a gun and shot me.

"I went down, and, using my head, stayed quiet. I suppose they thought they had done for me. Anyway, they left me where I fell. Then Salazar and his crowd raided my warehouse. Several of my boys put up a fight and were wiped out like

rats. They took every pound of my rubber and then touched a match to the whole layout.

"As soon as they were gone I managed to crawl to the river. I found an old dugout there and set out. Somewhere along the line I passed out—and—here I am. I was coming down to your place for help. I must have drifted past."

TRENHOLM'S eyes closed, and lines of weariness and pain furrowed his fine, high-bred features. "Might as well have died, I guess," he whispered. "I'm wiped out. Haven't a *milreis* to my name."

"I have," said Cleve quickly. "And it is all yours to call on, Jack. Now forget everything and try for some sleep. Salazar will wish he'd died at birth before I get done with him, the dirty swine. We'll make him pay you back, ten for one. So quit worrying, old man."

Trenholm smiled faintly and grew quiet. Cleve, his lean, brown jaw set like iron, tiptoed out of the cabin. He nodded to the waiting Luis. "Cast off the canoe and start the motor," he ordered.

Long before he came in sight of his own Headquarters, Cleve Morley knew what he was going to see. Therefore he was not surprised when the clearing came in view to disclose nothing but piles of black embers from which a few stray wisps of smoke were still curling. Luis was too stunned and frightened to say a word.

The tiny wharf alone was left intact and, when the launch nosed up to it, Cleve took his rifle from the rack in the launch cabin and stepped ashore.

"Keep the motor turning and be ready to run," he told Luis briefly.

There was no need of such caution, however. Not an atom of life of any kind existed in the clearing.

Cleve counted twelve bodies. Ten of them he recognized as his own caucheros, including Alcides, his faithful old major domo. Marks of treacherous bullets and terrible machete slashes were on all of them. The other two were evidently Salazar's men, who had fallen in the attack.

There was nothing Cleve could do. Everything was gone, his men, the buildings, his stores of petrol and supplies, and, lastly, his season's gather of rubber.

Cleve Morley had lived the past ten years of his life in a hard school. Danger and hardship had been his constant companions. As far as he knew, he had played the game for all it was worth, but had played it fairly. He had bargained, but never cheated. He had built for the future, but now, at his feet, lay the literal ashes of his dreams.

HE understood clearly now why Salazar had not met him at Correia. The renegade had never meant to from the first. He had maneuvered to get Cleve down there and had paid a crowd of river scum to see that he never came back. He had planned from the beginning to wipe out both Cleve and Trenholm and to steal their store of rubber, the combined value of which would easily approximate thirty thousand dollars.

It would avail little to report the matter to the authorities down river. Notoriously corrupt and with greedy palms always outstretched, they would easily be silenced by Salazar. A few hundred *milreis*, judiciously spread about by the renegade, would put him in the clear.

Cleve realized perfectly that any satisfaction, both physical and financial, gotten from Salazar, would have to come through his own individual efforts.

The light in Cleve's gray eyes

grew colder and colder, the set of his jaw more grim. There in the midst of the bland, mocking jungle, surrounded by the dead bodies of men who had been faithful unto death, he took a silent vow. Salazar would pay!

He went swiftly back to the launch, where he gauged the contents of the fuel tank. He wrote rapidly on a page of his notebook, tore it out, and gave it to Luis.

“WITH the current to help, you have enough petrol to reach Manaos,” he told Luis. “It is necessary that *Señor* Trenholm be placed under expert medical care as soon as possible.

“When you have seen him safely to the hospital you will take that note to the British merchant, *Señor* Willoughby. He will give you supplies and men who are faithful. You will then return to Silva Simoes and wait for word from me. I take to the jungle trails to visit friends.”

Luis pocketed the note carefully, nodding his understanding. But his honest face was doleful. “*Señor*, you go after Salazar alone—and it is not safe. Luis would go with you—to fight by your side—and die there if the good God wills it so.”

The bitterness in Cleve’s eyes softened slightly. His hand went out and rested for a moment on the faithful servant’s shoulder.

“It is well to have known such as you, Luis. It saves my faith in human nature. But rest your worry. I go after Salazar, but not alone. We will live to see happier days, you and I. Take good care of *Señor* Trenholm.”

Swiftly Cleve made up a frugal pack of food and extra ammunition for his rifle. About his lean waist he belted a heavy revolver. Then, with a canteen of water slung over his shoulder and a trail cutting

machete swinging from its thong at his wrist, he stepped again ashore.

Luis cast off, started the motor, and swung the launch about. Coupled with the push of the current, the smooth, surging power of the launch soon put it beyond sight down river. And as it vanished into the brassy glare of the sun’s reflection, Cleve Morley strode into the jungle, heading north and east.

All through the long, torrid hours of the afternoon, Cleve Morley fought the jungle. Though in a perpetual half-twilight, caused by the arching foliage overhead, there was no coolness anywhere. Lean and hardened of body as he was, Cleve was bathed in sweat.

The air was close, damp—foul with the breath of decay and rot, as fallen tree and branch and leaf underwent swift transition back to the festering soil. Mosquitos formed a vicious, humming cloud about him, and the almost invisible pium fly stung and burrowed.

In places there existed the faint markings of a trail, but for hours at a time the subdued flash of the hard-swung machete blade cut and slashed to open a way through the tangled lianas and riotous vegetation.

AT sunset Cleve broke through the last leafy barrier, to step into a long narrow clearing. Here was a line of huts, low and thatched, with a number of brown, nearly naked figures moving among them.

At Cleve’s appearance, a long quavering cry rang out and there was a scurry of excitement among the Indians. But Cleve advanced steadily, announcing himself in native tongue.

Recognition was swift and warriors who had caught up bow and arrow, spear and blow-gun, put aside the weapons and crowded forward, grunting their pleasure.

Of all the tribes with whom he had traded, Cleve knew that these Witotos bore him the deepest and most permanent friendship. Two years before it had been Cleve's good fortune to save the chief's only son from what would have been certain death at the claws of a wounded jaguar. And for that act the old chief Baiga had sworn undying fealty to him.

SURROUNDED by the Indians, Cleve made his way to Baiga's hut, where the old man squatted cross-legged beside a tiny, smudgy fire.

"Ubeshi—friend," said Cleve.

"Ubeshi," answered Baiga, signing Cleve to sit and rest.

"I come in weariness and trouble," said Cleve quietly in the Witoto dialect. "And I would ask a favor of my friend, Baiga."

The old chief made a simple gesture with his hand. "The favor is granted," he answered. "Name what you will."

"With the rising of the sun I returned from down river," explained Cleve. "I found my friend, *Señor* Trenholm near death. I found his men and my own, all dead. I found our homes burned, our rubber stolen. It was Salazar who did this wrong. I have come to Baiga and his people for help."

The old chieftain's black eyes flashed. "That is great wickedness of which you speak. Baiga and his people will help you gladly. Tell us what we shall do."

"I would locate Salazar and his men first," said Cleve. "It is in my mind that they have taken the lagoon crossing between Florencao and Silva Simoes. Somewhere along there they will land and wait for the world to forget their wickedness.

"I would ask Baiga to send out

runners to locate them. When that is done, I would take Baiga's warriors and creep upon him, to punish them and regain that which is mine and *Señor* Trenholm's."

"*Tchipat*—good," grunted Baiga. "It shall be as you wish."

The chief lifted his head and barked a guttural order. Three of his warriors immediately caught up their weapons and loped like drifting shadows into the jungle.

The chief signed to the women hovering shyly in the background, who scurried into immediate industry. "We shall feast and rest and talk until my runners return," he said.

The night passed and dawn fought its way into the jungle coverts before the scouts returned, to report immediately to Baiga. The chief dismissed them and sent for Cleve, who had slept like a dead man, drugged with weariness from his battle with the jungle.

"The quarry has been found," stated Baiga. "It was as you said, my friend. They rest beside their boat on the lagoon. My warriors are ready to go with you to the attack."

"Good," answered Cleve, his eyes flashing. "Baiga and his people are faithful friends. They shall be rewarded. I would leave immediately."

TWENTY of his men Baiga called before him, to harangue them with gleaming eyes and swift suggestive gestures. A subtle excitement grew upon the warriors. They were eager, unafraid, and as they filed into the jungle, they chanted a soft, guttural cadence.

For the bigger part of another day Cleve Morley tramped the jungle. But now the going was easier, for the bronzed, gliding figures before him traversed cunningly hidden trails.

Two hours before sundown, the

line before Cleve came to an abrupt halt. Scouts who had gone ahead reported Salazar and his men not half a league distant. Cleve took command.

"We will rest and eat," he told the warriors. "We will need strength for the battle. And we shall use the darkness as a shield."

CLEVE made the attack just before midnight. An hour before, he and the Indians had crept upon the unsuspecting camp of Salazar and his men. The camp was a drunken bedlam, for visions of the easy profits to come from the results of their murderous forays on Cleve's and Trenholm's camps, seemed to have unleashed the animalism in the raiders.

They lurched about a great fire, singing, cursing, yelling, until with wits completely addled and brain stupefied by the amounts of aguardiente consumed, they slumped like logs into bestial sleep, a sleep from which, in their case at least, there would be no waking.

Salazar alone appeared to be the only sober one. He sat apart, his heavy, brutal, scheming features a shadowy blur in the fitful light.

Sight of the man did strange things to Cleve Morley. An atavistic urge engulfed him as his thoughts swept back over Jack Trenholm, wounded and beaten near to death—of faithful, gentle Alcides and the rest of his murdered men, of the dead embers of the little kingdom he had established with such sacrifice and toil.

There was little to choose between Cleve Morley and the motionless, wraith-like Indians grouped behind him, in his present state of mind.

He knew a feral hunger, a cold, killing rage, a wild desire to come to grips with Salazar. This was the

jungle, and the law of the jungle laid its implacable grip on Cleve. The survival of the fittest! No mercy had been shown—none would be.

Many of Cleve's past theories were thrown aside and forgotten at that moment. He had trusted Salazar—to what cost and sorrow! Ruthlessness begets ruthlessness. The old, primal law—an eye for an eye!

Cleve stirred slightly and sent a whispered order circulating. The man sitting against the tree yonder was his. None other was to interfere.

The mournful cry of the night bittern broke from Cleve's lips. It was the signal of attack!

A deep, harsh humming sounded, the twang of bowstrings. Arrows whispered unseen through the murk, to end up with muffled thuds.

Figures stretched in drunken slumber by the fading fire, jerked and twitched. One of them lurched half to his feet, plucking at an arrow driven deeply in his side, a shriek of fear on his drooling lips.

Another arrow sped, striking him fairly in the throat. The shriek died to a gurgle and he pitched limply forward.

The next moment the little clearing was alive with the fitting forms of the Indians, while knife and war-club rose and fell.

FOR the moment Salazar sat immovable, like a man peering in on some dreadful nightmare. Then he came to his feet, roaring curses, dragging at the revolver swinging to his belt.

Before he could free it, Cleve Morley launched himself to the attack. He forgot his own gun—scorned any other weapon but his bare hands. He lashed a terrific blow into Salazar's face, driving the burly renegade half to his knees.

Then they were at grips, locked chest to chest.

Wild with fear and pain, Salazar's strength was terrific, beast-like. He clawed blindly at Cleve, tearing his shirt from his back as though it were a wisp of tissue paper, and his talon fingers furrowed the flesh and brought blood leaping in their path.

BUT the lean, tawny-headed man who fought him was a rapier of livid steel who drew upon wells of hidden power and poured it out in a devastating flood.

He ripped himself from Salazar's clawing grasp and hammered leaden fists home with deadly accuracy. It was impossible for flesh and blood to stand up before such punishment, and Salazar gave way, grunting, panting and bellowing his hoarse agony and hate. Round and round the dimming circle of the fire they moved.

The Witotos, their work finished with dispatch and thoroughness, stood and watched with hot, savage eyes the incomprehensible ways of the white man. Here, they recognized, was an antagonism which would be satisfied only by the death of one or the other, yet, instead of finishing the affair by a blow of a machete, the thrust of a knife, or a bullet from a "thunder-stick," these two men beat and clawed at each other like animals from the jungle.

It was Salazar who broke. Suddenly he seemed to remember the gun swinging at his hip. He gave ground in a clumsy leap and whipped out the weapon.

Like a panther Cleve Morley was upon him, whirling him and snapping a steely hand upon his wrist.

With a lunging continuation of the same move, Cleve swept Salazar's hand behind his back and up. It was the hammer-lock, and Cleve drove all his weight and strength to

a finishing heave. A blubbing shriek burst from Salazar as his shoulder went out, and the gun fell from his nerveless fingers.

Salazar went to the trampled earth, where he wallowed like some stricken porcine animal.

Cleve stepped back, sweeping the sweat from his eyes. And at the same moment Salazar snapped erect, whirling high a machete which his sound hand had happened to fall on.

Cleve went in under the vicious blade, throwing all he had into one last blow, with Salazar's jaw a full and open target. The punch landed with an impact that jarred Cleve to his very heels.

Salazar gasped and spun slowly around. His arms and shoulders fell into a hunch, the machete dropping to the ground, where it seemed to rebound with malignant cunning.

For a fractional second it balanced on its heavy hilt, its deadly point upright. As though his legs were suddenly cut from under him, Salazar fell forward, and the gleaming blade of the machete sank into his body.

IN the gray mists of dawn, Cleve Morley roused himself. He was naked to the waist, and his torso was a mass of dried blood, bruises and long, scarlet welts where Salazar's mad fingers had clawed. He was frozen with stiffness and it was with difficulty he spoke to the stoically waiting Witotos. Salazar and his men lay where they had fallen, and Cleve indicated them with his hand.

"These," he ordered, "will go into the lagoon, where the jacare will feed." While this order was being carried out, Cleve made his slow, painful way aboard Salazar's big power scow, which was tied to the bank. The scow was packed with rubber, loaded to the last available inch.

(Concluded on page 160)

PEARL Pirate

*Flaming Lead and the Evil
Glitter of Knives in a
Forgotten Outpost of
the Coral Sea*

A Complete Novelette

By L. RON HUBBARD

Author of "The Green God," "Danger Ahead," etc.

SMOKE ENGEL shook a violent finger under the yellow nose of Chan-tso Lan, the money lender, giving the greasy fat Chinaman the full benefit of enraged gray eyes beneath unruly, straw-colored hair.

"You thief!" cried Smoke. "You knew damned well that copra was going down in price! That was why you were so fast to lend me money on the *Witch*. You think you can get away with anything down here in the Coral Sea, don't you? You think you can hang onto those loan papers, don't you? Cancel that debt, yellow-belly, or I'll make putty out of your greasy hulk!"

But Chan-tso Lan was bland and unmoved—he seemed round and inoffensive in spite of the evil glitter in his brown pig-eyes. The Chinaman merely clapped his hands together and gazed about the room of his house above the lagoon.

"You will not pay, Mr. Engel?"



The chattering death song of the

The Oriental voice was heavy and sinister.

"No!" shouted Smoke. "And I'm not going to turn my schooner over to your thieving business, either!"

"Then," shrugged Chan, "perhaps you need a little persuasion." And he nodded toward the bulging curtains at the far side of the room.

Smoke stepped back and stared at the silken wall, and the move saved him a nasty wound in his side. A yellow arm shot out and flipped a deadly white streak of steel toward the American, and Smoke heard the twang of the vicious passage.

But before he could move to retaliate with the gun at his side, he felt the bite of steel in his arm and knew that another knife had been thrown at him from behind.

Chan smiled unconcernedly and retreated away from his desk out of



machine-gun lashed across the deck

range—and this, too, seemed to constitute a signal.

Yellow bodies, quicker than the eye, seemed to boil through the door toward Smoke Engel, and the ferocity of evil yellow faces coiled about him with hard black eyes and jagged yellow teeth. Knives glittered with terrible light which seemed as alive and writhing as poisonous snakes intent on a kill.

Smoke struck out with a terrific right to a yellow jaw and saw the man reel back, senseless. In that moment he knew two things. This was no mere "persuasion."

Chan fully intended to have him killed outright, for then, who would there remain to question the rightful ownership of the trim schooner which Smoke had long sailed about the South Seas?

Chan was not the only one who wanted possession of the *Witch*,

but none so far had dared to face the strength and agility of the tall, lithe American. And death was a small thing here in this forgotten British outpost in the Coral Sea.

As he fought, the heat of the tropics coiled about Smoke as swift and deadly as the yellow opponents, for a man could not long exert himself with the thermometer hovering around a hundred and ten—and the stench of unwashed Oriental bodies was sickening.

Chan's men were striving to hold Smoke's arms so that one of their number could deal a fatal knife thrust to the American's heart, but Smoke had other ideas. His steel hands crashed into bone and flesh as swiftly and fatally as iron hammers.

With the sweat of exertion making his clothes sodden about him, Smoke brought one after another of the yellow men close to him with

one arm while he lashed out with a fist.

In the close quarters of the room it was difficult to find enough space to fight, and Smoke was afraid to back against the treacherous draperies which alone might have offered him some reprieve.

He was fighting now as he had never fought before, and the toll of his fists writhed upon the grass mat floor, grim warnings to the others.

A knife sank deep into Smoke's wrist, bringing forth a gush of scarlet blood which was not long in mingling with the blood drawn from the opponents. Red, splattered dots stood out weirdly against sweating, yellow faces.

A man Smoke had knocked down now crept along the floor toward the weaving legs of the white man—and the intent expression on the battered yellow face boded no good to Smoke—for once down on the grass mats, there would be little hope of victory for the white man.

SMOKE heaved a body backward across the room with the speed and harshness of a pile driver, sending the Chinaman crashing down into a rattan chair beside Chan, who dodged without changing expression.

The Oriental on the floor came closer, hitching himself forward painfully, to shoot out an arm as sinister as that of the slimy octopus. The yellow hand sought a hold on the white man's ankle, that Smoke's balance might be destroyed and the fight ended.

But the hand never reached its destination. A pistol shot from the doorway cut into the *mêlée* like a knife, instantly silencing all combat.

Smoke whirled toward the opening, expecting to see one of his Chamorro sailors—but the man he saw was heralded to bring no suc-

cor. Smoke's gray eyes widened as recognition flashed across his face.

The hulk of dark flesh and matted black hair who held a smoking pistol silhouetted against the whiteness outside was a figure well calculated to strike terror into the heart of any Coral Sea trader or merchant. The infamy of Portuguese Joe Herrero, pearl pirate, lay as heavy and black upon the southern seas as a blot of ink upon paper.

THE pearl pirate grinned thickly into the surprised faces before him and then shifted the pistol suggestively toward the yellow victim of his announcing shot who sprawled hideously in a pool of red on the mat floor.

"Good afternoon, gentlemen," said Portuguese Joe in a silky voice. "I hope I have not interrupted your sport. Ah, yes, and Mr. Engel, I believe.

"You know, Mr. Engel, I have yet to thank you for the wonderful cargo of shell which you so kindly gave me last year. I did rather well with the shipment."

Smoke wiped a bloody hand across his mouth, leaving a dark smear and a salty taste against his lips. He opened his tight mouth to speak but snapped his jaws shut with a vicious click. The gray eyes had lost the light of battle and were now filled with a deadly hate which Portuguese Joe feigned to ignore.

Chan's expressionless face had suddenly become a blasted ruin of greasy terror and the Chinaman's heavy poise slid from him to leave a quivering, ugly, hateful being who groveled beside the desk.

Portuguese Joe cleared his throat noisily and spat upon the mats. "But there is little use in wasting time and effort upon ceremony. You, Mr. Chan-tso Lan, will please favor me with your bag of black pearls about

which you were foolish enough to brag. And quickly!"

The Chinaman cast a sweeping look of despair at his frozen warriors and then began to babble that he had no black pearls.

BUT he had no more than mentioned the fact once when Portuguese Joe calmly sighted the chest of a stricken yellow warrior and squeezed down on the trigger of his pistol. The shot blasted a gaping hole in the saffron chest of the man, knocking the lifeless body back with a hammer-like viciousness.

Those in the room cringed back and Smoke took an involuntary step toward Portuguese Joe. He thought better of the move and stopped.

Chan dived into a makeshift safe and brought forth a small white box which he threw fiercely at the pearl pirate—showing just once that he had some atom of defiance in his shriveled soul.

Portuguese Joe caught the box deftly and grinned, taking his eyes away from the room just long enough to see the eight black pellets which lay snugly in the cotton in the white box.

The pearl pirate gave the assemblage a brief bow and slowly backed away, deliberately turning about and showing them his back as he went down the road toward the harbor.

No one in the room moved, for they knew that unseen riflemen had the entire room covered—otherwise the pirate would never have been so brave as to show his back to foemen.

Smoke grinned mirthlessly at the prostrate Chan.

"You never can tell," he intoned, "when old Lady Fate is going to swap tables on you, Chaf. And now that that is over with,"—he drew his pistol slowly out of its flap holster and leveled it on the Chinaman,

able to do so for the first time, "how about finishing our little game?"

Chan's head came up with a jerk and the pig-eyes stared into the muzzle of the pistol. "Mr. Engel, I have something to ask of you." The voice was steady and expressionless, once more coming from the bland mask. "You are a fighting man and I have need of one just now."

"No tricks!" commanded Smoke with a brief gesture at the still motionless yellow warrior.

"No," said Chan, "no tricks! If you will get back those black pearls, I will give you the papers to the *Witch*."

"Huh!" sniffed Smoke. "You can fight your own battles, yellow-belly. I might have a score of my own to settle with Portuguese Joe, but that has nothing to do with you. Get me?"

Chan was disconcerted, but only for a moment. A greedy flame could be seen licking up in back of the brown eyes. "All right, Mr. Engel. I will give you ten thousand dollars cash on your return."

"Put it in writing!" snapped Smoke.

II

WITH a scrap of paper jammed into his dirty ducks, Smoke ran out of the hut into the whitely molten sunlight and poised for a brief instant to stare out across the blue lagoon.

He saw two ships anchored there—one of them the trim white *Witch*, swinging gently in an offshore breeze, the other a strange black craft, heavy under jet canvas above jet hull, which flew no flag and knew no law. Smoke started to run again when he heard the rattle of anchor chains aboard the *Negrato*. He knew that the pirate ship would not be long in getting under way.

The Chamorro sailors of the *Witch*

watched the approaching longboat which carried their captain, and black faces mirrored the singleness of knowledge which was theirs as soon as they saw the determined expression on Smoke's face.

As one man the sailors turned about and stared after the departing *Negrito* and then without further expression the crew ran to the hal-yards.

Smoke came aboard to the tune of hysterically rattling booms and chains.

With a strong brown hand on the heavy wheel, Smoke stood on the poop deck and watched the beach swing past the *Witch's* bows as the trim craft came around to head for the open sea. A Chamorro came up on deck with an arm load of machetes and rifles and Smoke nodded with approval as he watched the fellow distribute the arms to an eager crew.

TH**E**R**E** was no mystery in this avidity of the Chamorros for a fight. In the first place, they were some of the toughest specimens of the brown race ever assembled on a deck, and in the second place, the crew of the *Negrito* consisted of black Melanesians—men from the Solomon Islands. And between the brown and the black lay an age-old hatred which was forever fanning up with fangs of warfare.

The *Witch* lunged out into the sea swell as though she, too, were anxious to close with the black ship, and as the white bows clove the running sea the tenseness of taut booms and concentration and expectancy of battle fell over the entire assemblage like a cloud of red.

The *Negrito* had a lead of a full thousand yards, but the *Negrito's* bottom was as foul as her crew and owner, and her heels were leaden when compared to the fleetness of her pursuer.

As soon as the two ships came in sight of each other, more canvas was seen to slither up the black ship's masts and the white froth of smashed seas boiled up higher under the black bowsprit.

Yard by yard the distance between the two ships lessened until from either the men on the other's decks were easy targets in spite of plunging, crazily-canted decks.

A mad, hate-filled smash of rifle fire flickered up from both decks almost at the same time. Smoke turned over his wheel to a brown sailor to give a hand at the marksmanship.

He had no sooner quitted the post than the new helmsman tautened like a struck sword, driven lifelessly back by the cruel impact of a bullet in his side.

Smoke's expression did not change as he turned and waved another seaman to the helm.

Chamorros in the scuppers were methodically loading and firing at the fleeing black vessel and now and again a reeling dark figure on the *Negrito's* decks proved that some of the shots were taking effect.

Smoke turned and gave a swift order to his helmsman and the *Witch* darted away on a new course which would eventually bring her directly abreast of the *Negrito*.

The sniping went on, more slowly now as the men settled to the business, and the two ships came together as the white schooner relentlessly closed the distance.

CH**A**M**O**R**R**O**S** broke out grappling hooks and huddled ready with them in the scuppers while Smoke calmly counted the odds against him and sent brief cautions and orders along the gunwale.

The tactics he was about to employ had not been seen on the high seas since the days of Henry Mor-

gan and Drake, and Smoke prayed that he might be at least a portion as successful as those two gentlemen rovers had been.

With a crashing grind of wood scraping wood, the two schooners slammed together. Grappling hooks clinked home to bite the two ships firmly together in an embrace which would only be broken by the death of either or both.

Machetes waved viciously under the gunwales as black arose to repulse a charging brown wave.

Dark faces were hideous in their hates and white discs of fight-widened eyes stared straight into filed fangs as two races closed with each other to continue the battle which had gone on for thousands of years.

Smoke leaped up on a bit and emptied his pistol into the howling black mob below him—and as he fired his last shot before hastily reloading he knew that the odds were clearly against him.

IT was too late to turn back now—and turning back had never found a place in Smoke's creed. And so he went on, though in rushing forth he was trodding close up on the portals of death.

Machetes crashed on machetes and the spiteful barks of pistols and rifles blended into the terrific mêlée of shouting, screaming men. Hate, blood and death were as one on the deck of the *Negrito* as the scuppers began to widen out into a thick gush of red fluid.

Arms hung by narrow threads as machetes found their marks—hung or existed no longer. A head rolled away from the twitching, bleeding body of a Melanesian to come to rest against Smoke's leg as he stood and exchanged shot for shot with armed men on the black ship's quarterdeck.

Bullets whined off the bits or cracked into suddenly collapsing

bodies. The shrieks of hate were now intermingled with screams of pain as the deck became littered with wounded and dying. Now and then bodies slipped away into the sea, the slight gulf which still intervened between the clasped ships.

With his last cartridge gone, unable to attract the attention of his men for a direction of the attack, Smoke wrapped steel fingers about the head of a belaying pin and crashed his way aft toward the deck house where he knew Portuguese Joe must be.

So far in the fight he had seen nothing of the dark hulk and the battle would be over with the death of one of the commanders. Smoke swiftly cut away a path through milling, death-locked bodies toward the short ladder which would surely lead to the cessation of the fight.

Bullets fanned close to his tan cheeks and powder stung his skin where it was exposed through his ripped clothing. The poop deck was a hot bed of powder flame where the late-mad blacks were firing into friend and foe with appalling impartiality.

Smoke skirted an open hatch behind the mast and leaped up to the raised deck, his belaying pin held on high. A snaggle-tooth black, his breath terrible in the face of the white man, pressed a hot pistol muzzle into Smoke's ribs and jerked back on the trigger.

THE white man darted to one side and brought the pin down with a force which carried it half through the black face of his assailant. Failing to notice the bullet crease in his side he leaped up to the top of the deck house and ran across black tarpaulins toward the wheel.

There was no thought now given to navigation and the wheel spun unattended before the open compan-

ionway which led down into the cabins.

For a brief instant Smoke stopped tensely above the wheel, a bloody scarecrow of a man, his muscled torso half-bare through the bloody strip which remained of his shirt, the red-dyed brass of the belaying pin held in his stained hand, a wild, savage glare of battle making an awesome mask of his tanned face.

Oblivious to the snarls of hastily directed bullets which snapped about him, he threw back his shoulders, hefted the pin, and dived down through the companionway in quest of Portuguese Joe.

III

AS HE reached the end of the passageway, Smoke plunged into the main salon utterly unheedful of the danger which might be coiling up to spring upon him in the dusky interior. It was only the swiftness of his motion which saved his life.

He had no more than bulked through the door than a chattering death song of a machine-gun licked out at him to send churning splinters away from the bulkhead he had just passed.

Without hesitation Smoke threw himself at full length on the floor of the cabin, clawing at the rug under his flattened hands in an attempt to heave himself forward toward the gun and to one side out of range.

A bullet hammered into his shoulder, sending him backward across the saloon deck. Smoke glanced up to see the hideous, vengeful blotch against the skylight which was the contorted face of Portuguese Joe.

In that same glance Smoke saw the muzzle of the water-cooled machine-gun dip down at him, saw the belt jerk as it fed the gun, saw brass cartridges spill out of the breech.

Slugs reached out with hot metal fingers to rip out the white man's heart, but Smoke rolled aside with the swiftness of a panther—a fraction of an inch ahead of the racing bullets which snapped a quick path across the rug, biting out gashes of fabric and wood at the rate of six hundred a minute.

ALL sounds within and upon these fight maddened ships were suddenly concentrated in the crashing of the machine-gun and Smoke knew that his life depended upon getting past the arc limit of the tripod before Portuguese Joe, crouching wolfishly a few feet away, could swing the muzzle directly at the conspicuous, rolling target.

A scant arms' length away from Smoke the gun's muzzle was searing him with powder in its attempt to stab him with lead. Though the odds were long against the success of the move, Smoke shot out a hand to grasp the crimson-hot barrel to stay the arc before it reached its fatal limit.

Though the steel burned the flesh from the bones of his fingers, Smoke held on and savagely thrust the barrel away from him.

Portuguese Joe, intent upon his marksmanship, was caught off guard and his ugly fac was suddenly unmasked to show mingled terror and surprise.

He had been so confident that Smoke would at least attempt to bring him out of the salon and that the vicious weapon would do its work with appalling swiftness, that he had not once considered the possibility of defeat. And now that the thought sank down into him it momentarily robbed him of his strength.

An instant's inaction allowed Smoke to reach the pearl pirate's throat with a steel hand, allowed him to lurch up into a crouching

posture which suddenly uncoiled into a spring bearing Portuguese Joe back with the sheer ferocity of suddenly tripled revenge.

Disregarding his burns and wounds, Smoke held the black throat in his strong hand and drove a sledgehammer fist into the dark features of the pearl pirate.

The blow would have been sufficient to kill any ordinary being, but the hard skull of Portuguese Joe only bruised the knuckles of Smoke.

Again the fist drove forward in a terrific punch and Smoke felt a bone snap in his hand. Before him he saw the blurred ugliness of the pearl pirate lurch upward, bringing Smoke with him.

Forgotten were the machine-gun and clubs, for here was all the wild ferocity of beasts suddenly unleashed. Neither holds nor blows of any description were barred as the two swayed out into the center of the salon, locked in a savage clinch which did not restrain them from striking and gouging each other at the closest possible quarters.

They stumbled over the machine-gun and were oblivious to it as it banged over on its side and lay dismantled on the floor.

Smoke pressed his thumbs into the other's eyes and with a roar of agony Portuguese Joe wrapped powerful arms about the other's slim body in an attempt to break Smoke's back.

IN the musty dimness Smoke saw one of his thumbs sink home and felt, simultaneously, an agonizing twinge as he was relentlessly bent backward.

His senses reeled and he felt the other's evil breath against his cheek, saw a blur of bared teeth and snarling features.

Marshaling all his energy in one swift drive, Smoke doubled up a knee and sent the cap crashing into

the dark one's groin. There was an instant of silence into which the howls from the deck came as a far away nightmare. Then Portuguese Joe staggered back, doubling up, for an instant utterly helpless.

Smoke failed to recognize the strength of his enemy in that brief moment and he was caught off guard as his opponent straightened suddenly and crashed all his weight directly against Smoke.

WITH a shout of rage the white man gave ground, attempting to summon his strength quickly for another attack. But he was driven backward until he felt the door of the salon at either hand and knew that the bare wood of the passageway was under his feet.

Like an enraged bull, Portuguese Joe pressed his advantage with a force that was not to be denied and the thick, hairy arms strove to encircle Smoke for a clinch that would mean the white man's finish.

Smoke felt the ladder at his heels and stepped up, fighting off the arms, one step at a time, until the clear sky and the gathering night were all that remained behind him. He felt the wheel at his back and unwittingly stepped aside.

However enraged the pearl pirate might be, he was quick to conceive a plan which would mean a quick end to his assailant. Behind Smoke there now lay only a low rail and the terrible depths of the sea, and as he was forced rapidly back, Smoke realized his fate.

There was no escape now and he could only deal out blows and evade the clinging arms. Slowly he gave way toward the rail.

Smoke knew that within a minute's time he would trip over the rail, plunge backward, to be swallowed up by the waves. Even if he regained the surface it was improbable that

he would escape the vicious jaws of barracudas and sharks.

Over the shoulder of the charging Portuguese Joe, he could see the milling mob on the deck forward and knew that the battle there was as terrific as when it started. No eyes were turned aft for all men were too busy parrying off blows and dealing death to their enemies.

Shots echoed through the ship and splinters splattered out where bullets bit into bulwarks and masts. The *Witch* still clung to the *Negrito* with iron hooks and Smoke knew that he would be victorious if he could only elude his assailant.

But getting away from Portuguese Joe was impossible and the flick of a second seemed an age when Smoke's heel touched the lower part of the rail and he felt it pressing against him, unbalancing him. In an instant he would plunge backward into the dark, greedy sea to vanish forever from the world of men.

In one last gesture of defiance, Smoke smashed a broken fist into the dark blur before him and saw blood spurt from the thick mouth. But however heartening it might have been to smash the pearl pirate's face, the move was fatal. With redoubled strength, Portuguese Joe drove Smoke up and over the rail.

IV

EMPTY space flashed about Smoke as he fell and though it was only a few feet down to the waves, he felt that the distance was infinite. Green-black froth curled about him as he plunged into the water which tore into his eyes and mouth, driving the life-breath from him, strangling him.

With mighty thrashings of arms and legs, Smoke broke his plunge downward and began to come back up to the surface. Hours seemed to

pass before he again was able to fill his air-starved lungs on the surface.

Above him was the dark hulk of the black ship and beside that was the *Witch's* stern, but between both ships and Smoke were things which writhed through the water with the ferocity of wolves ready to pounce viciously upon whatever the battle might offer.

TRIANGULAR fins were there by the dozen, attracted by the many dead bodies which already drifted about the bobbing, fight-racked ships. It was not the abundance of fins which caused Smoke to experience a twinge of terror. He knew what lay beneath the surface of the waves—barracudas with unseen death were waiting there ready to strike with the speed of light.

But Smoke did not wait for death to overtake him. He counted upon the presence of much meat to allow his safe passage to the rudder chains of the *Negrito*. A shark fin brushed by him and he kicked out in the water with one foot meeting slimy resistance as the sea-beast shot away to come back to attack.

Smoke struck out as calmly as possible for the rudder but he was unable to compel himself to forget the danger which swirled all about him. He felt a tug at his pants-leg and knew that something had struck at him. He shot out his arms in a long stroke and scissor-kicked, trying to ward off death as well as swim.

Then above him he could feel the waves hitting at the rudder and knew that if he could survive an instant longer he would be partially safe.

His hand caught hold of a chain and with a movement which was strengthened by the horror which surrounded him on every side, he

swung himself up between the rudder and the ship, hastily dragging his entire length out of the water.

Teeth ripped at his trousers just as his legs left the water and he glanced back to see the swirl caused by a six-foot barracuda whose two feet of teeth had barely missed dragging Smoke back into the sea.

Smoke saw that the rope of a longboat trailed over the stern into the sea and that, when the *Negrito* pitched, the rope swung toward him.

He stretched out and took three passes at the line before he could capture it. Then, with the rope held firmly, he looked again at the sea which licked at him. To swing away from the rudder meant placing his legs back in the water.

With set jaws and a tense motion of his body, Smoke swung out on the rope, feeling the water beat at his shoes and expecting every instant that he would be pulled away from the line. As rapidly as possible he pulled himself up the rope, hand over hand, to breathe a sigh of relief when he was, at last, clear of the waves once and for all.

CAUTIOUSLY he peered over the rail and down forward. The battle was quieter now, and the quarterdeck was deserted save for the dead.

The hulk of Portuguese Joe was moving toward two Chamorro seamen who stood back and hacked futilely into thin air with machetes, their strength robbed by the terror which had gripped them at their first sight of this apparition.

Smoke heaved himself over the rail and dropped to the sticky deck with cat-like stillness. Weaving in and out between bits and the wheel, he came to the top of the passageway which led down into the salon he had been forced to quit but a few moments before.

His face was a savage mask of determination as he ran down the ladder and into the cabin.

Wasting no time, he stooped over the sprawled machine-gun and swiftly reloaded his cargo of potential death, making sure that the weapon was in readiness for the last scene of the fight aboard the *Negrito*.

Hugging the heavy gun to him, Smoke ran forward through the cabins and found himself ascending a ladder which must lead to amidships and whose door must command the entire deck and furnish protection at the same time.

WITH a kick he sent the door slamming open, and spreading the tripod with almost the same motion, he set the machine-gun down on the deck and quickly squatted behind its grim length.

Between clenched teeth he called out in the Chamorro he knew the Melanesians could not understand, "Lie down! Get to the port side of the ship. I'm going to fire!"

With the alien words whipping about them, the Melanesians dropped all holds and suddenly jumped stupidly back to stare at the afterdeck. They had understood no word that had been spoken and were not quick-witted enough to follow the example so swiftly set by Smoke's sailors.

Portuguese Joe whirled around and stared at Smoke as though his late assailant must surely be a ghost. But then the fighting energy within the dark hulk was too strong long to listen to the superstitious voice within him and he followed his animal impulse to charge.

Smoke saw the pearl pirate lunging forward and called out in English, "Stop! Another step and I'll fire!"

But the other paid no heed to the words. Brutality flicked savagely

out of the pig-brown eyes and the arms swung greedily at the man's sides. His steps were certain and unflinching as he walked upon the gun.

"Stop!" shouted Smoke, and then saw that Portuguese Joe was so confident of his own strength and prowess that he thought himself invincible.

The chattering death song of the machine-gun lashed out across the deck, seeming to come from between the strong hands of Smoke.

Portuguese Joe, twenty feet away stopped, a startled expression gradually creeping up over his face. The thick legs buckled, the hands broke at the wrists, the head came forward with a limp jerk, and the man who had been known over the South Pacific as a pirate tripped forward and sprawled in death.

Smoke released the trigger and relaxed slowly. His words were low as he said, "Well, you asked for it."

V

TWO weary ships came back to the island's harbor, shrouded in the lurid softness of the tropical night, to drop anchors side by side in the quietness of the lagoon as though they were now as companionable as they had been hateful before.

In the cabin of the *Witch*, Smoke was taking care of the last wounded man aboard the ships—himself. Beneath the soft yellow light which spread out from the gimballed hurricane lantern above him, he carefully adjusted bandages over his battered shoulders and patted adhesive tape into place with a gesture that was both weary and triumphant.

A smile crept across his tired face as he heard the purr of a motor-boat coming toward the ships from the slip below the house of Chan-

tso Lan and he glanced at the charting table where a white, wooden box sat in all serenity.

The swish of felt slippers approached the passageway leading to Smoke's cabin, to stop at the doorway and be replaced by a smooth, controlled voice.

"Good evening, Mr. Engel," said Chan, his eyes flickering over the room and finally coming to rest upon the white box. "I see that your mission has been successful."

"Yeah," agreed Smoke. "Almost. All I want now, Chan, is the cash in hand and the loan papers on the *Witch*."

CHAN stepped into the circle of light and the beams reflected upon the greasy, hairless skull. The Chinaman's robes fell about him and swirled voluminously upon the planking, giving the impression of enormous size to the fat bulk they enclosed.

Chan drew forth a sheaf of papers and a packet of green slips which were surmounted by a hundred-dollar bill. The bank wrapping of this last gave to understand that the packet was worth ten thousand dollars.

Smoke glanced at the papers, saw seemingly unlimited typewriting, then took the bills.

He glanced at the marking and at the green sides of the packet and then nodded his head toward the white box.

With the swiftness of an uncoiling snake, Chan reached out and snatched up his pearls to thrust the box into the sash about his waist. Then he whirled to the door and vanished, leaving the sound of hurried steps in his wake.

Smoke looked at the packets he held in his hand and then smiled toward the fresh sound of the starting motor. But his smile was short-

lived. His lips shot into a straight, hard line as he eyed the papers.

"Phony!" he bellowed. "The dirty yellow rat!" Quickly he stripped off the wrappings from the bills and found that the entire sheaf contained but one hundred dollars surmounting green paper. And there were no signatures on the loan papers.

All tiredness vanished from him as he sprang to the door and thundered across the deck to the rail, staring out into the blackness toward the sound of a sputtering motor. A cry from his tense lips brought a bandaged Chamorro sailor to his side with a flashlight and rifle and Smoke grasped the items with a savage wrench.

The powerful beams of the five-cell torch shot out whitely across the black lagoon, hovered over the water, and then stabbed straight into the grinning face of Chan as he gave the *Witch* a triumphant look.

Though the retreating boat was over two hundred yards away, the sound of Chan's voice purred clearly back to Smoke.

"He who laughs!" jeered Chan. And then the words slid off into a crackle of Chinese.

SMOKE was slow in turning off the light, for his bandaged hands rendered his fingers clumsy. He threw himself flat down in the scupper and dragged the startled brown sailor with him. Rifle bullets smashed into the timber and whined viciously out into the blackness.

Somewhere in all the darkness Chan had riflemen stationed to cover his swift retreat, and the beam of the light had given the key to Smoke's whereabouts.

Outrigger canoes were bobbing on the quiet water ready to smash hot death into the *Witch* should any attempt be made to pursue Chan. The

strategy of the move was apparent for even the bravest of men would think twice before following Chan into his house ashore.

But Smoke gave little thought to the riflemen as he plunged aft toward the longboat which hung in the davits. Two Chamorros lowered away on the blocks and then slid down to the launched craft to pick up ready oars and look to Smoke for orders.

THE motorboat was still purring and, though far away, Smoke knew that he had a very good chance of catching up with the man who had played him traitor. For the boat used by Chan did well to log off four knots while the longboat could lunge ahead at six.

Tense against the tiller, Smoke barked his stroke orders and the dim hulk of the *Witch* fell rapidly away. Phosphorous gleamed in pools where the oars bit into the water, twice on either side of the craft each time the straining brown backs gave the sweeps a lusty pull.

Smoke counted them in rhythm and tried to pick out his direction without giving his exact location. He knew that yellow men were listening to the creak of oarlocks and he knew that one streak of light would garner a leaden hurricane from the waiting rifles.

Far ahead Smoke saw the white stern of the motorboat growing more distinct with each passing minute. Chan, too, heard the pursuit and was not long in attempting to avoid apprehension.

A flashlight beam streaked and darted about the lagoon until it finally came to rest squarely upon the body of Smoke who stood upright, dressed in telltale whites, in the stern.

The instant the light hit him, Smoke heard the joyous bark of

hungry rifles as the yellow men squeezed down upon a perfect target.

The only sign Smoke gave that he understood and heard the whining snaps about him was to increase the stroke tempo. The longboat was now within a few feet of Chan and the bullets ceased as Chinamen laid down their guns to take up paddles.

Close beside the motorboat, Smoke could see five men on the other's thwarts. He jerked out the pistol at his side and, holding the weapon aloft, jumped the remaining distance of a yard to land solidly in the motorboat.

A Chinaman raised a rifle and shot. But before the yellow finger could release the trigger, Smoke hammered the man down with lead and saw the body topple back into the dark water, where it would soon be torn to bits by barracudas.

ARMS and hands sought to pull the white man down, sought to push him over the side, sought to batter him with oars and gun stocks.

Cries from across the water told Smoke that reinforcements would soon arrive for Chan, and he knew that he must work fast if he wished to live out the night.

The two Chamorros were now in the fight and their war cries were shrill and awful in the darkness. The motorboat lurched drunkenly, spilling water over the gunwales as the impact of blows and bodies smashed against the frail sides.

Chan in the stern crowded back as far as possible, hugging the white box in his sash, seeing the fight as a dark blur before him. His right hand brought out a pistol which he leveled at the bodies before him in the hope that he would be able to distinguish Smoke.

Smoke smashed a Chinaman in the face and knocked him over the side

into the water which was already beginning to boil with expectant and feasting sea-beasts. As he drew back his fist, the white man felt himself struck in the middle and hit a thwart at his legs which unbalanced him, making him stumble back perilously close to the gunwale.

One of the Chamorros was struck down to the bottom of the boat and as Smoke passed over him, the brown sailor reached up with a feeble hand and caught hold of Smoke's ankle to save him from plunging down to instant death in the water.

Smoke came back to the remaining three yellow men with fists which hammered a tattoo of destruction. He sent one of his assailants reeling back toward Chan in the stern and was quick to follow up his advantage against the remaining two.

Of his second Chamorro seaman, Smoke could see or hear nothing and he surmised that the man was either knocked out in the boat or was being torn to bits by the savage fish in the water.

Jumping over a thwart, the white man lunged aft where he knew Chan must be, only to be struck from behind by a glancing blow from a rifle butt. He staggered back, threw out an arm, and found that he had caught hold of one of the men.

The scream which split the air was one of sheer terror, for Smoke swung the Oriental clear from the planks and held him aloft to send him aft as a human projectile.

The crash of the body was followed by another scream—that of Chan, and Smoke stopped to try to see the swindler.

THAT moment of inaction was fatal. Men from the outrigger canoes were now arriving and their medley of howls rose to the stars as they scrambled out of their small boats into the craft.

The hard press of bodies bore Smoke down to the bottom of the motorboat and though he struck out with all the strength at his command, his blows seemed to have no effect upon his immediate circumstance.

He heard splashes and knew that he was knocking Chinamen into the lagoon, but he knew that two would spring upon him for every one he knocked away.

At last strong hands held him fast and motionless in the bottom, and though he cursed and tried to move, Smoke was sure that his last day on earth had arrived.

VI

CHAN lighted his electric torch and played the beam before him, letting it come to rest squarely on Smoke's face. Though the white man could see nothing of the swindler's countenance he knew the expression which must be there. It required no imagination to visualize the savage glare of triumph which overrode the yellow features.

A pistol jutted out from behind the torch and the light played evilly upon the glinting blue barrel. A yellow finger tensed on the trigger as the muzzle pointed straight between Smoke's eyes.

"Now," purred Chan, "before I send you to your doubtful reward, permit me to properly thank you for your favors. You have given me back the black pearls, worth half a million dollars; you have presented me with the *Witch*, which I have always wanted; and in addition to this, my friend, you have given me the *Negrito*, which I can most certainly use.

"And now, with your permission, Mr. Engel, I take your life as swiftly as possible." Chan laughed

harshly and the yellow finger came slowly back.

Smoke stared at the muzzle with a hypnotic fascination, knowing that he would never see the face which would send a hot metal slug boring into his brain. And until that moment Smoke had never realized how terribly much he wanted to live.

Chan suddenly screamed with terror and Smoke looked up beyond the gun to see the felt slippers cant up into the beam. The gun pointed up and flamed, sending the shot intended for Smoke straight into the heavens.

Scream after scream held the entire group in the boat motionless with horror. The felt slippers slid back and the light crashed into the boat to reverse its beam and point straight up into the writhing body of Chan.

Slowly the hulk of yellow flesh slid back over the stern, and then, with one last cry which ended in a sob, splashed into the water to be dragged far down into the black depths. Only a swirl of phosphorescent water marked the grave of Chan-tso Lan.

The men about Smoke were suddenly released from the awful terror which had held them and they now jumped aft to look down, completely forgetting Smoke. With a lunge back, Smoke snatched up a rifle which lay forgotten beneath the thwarts and slammed a cartridge into the chamber.

BUT there was now no fight in the yellow followers of Chan. Without a leader they were as docile as sheep, and after a brief moment's hesitation, Smoke commanded them to return to their outrigger canoes and push off for shore.

When the men had gone, Smoke stepped back to the stern and looked at the spot where Chan had disap-

peared, to see the answer to the Oriental's death.

A barracuda, its teeth glistening in the light of the torch Smoke held, came to the surface for a brief instant and then shot back into the bloody water. Smoke realized then what had happened.

One of Chan's robes had dangled into the water, giving the sea-beast a target at which to strike. And when the barracuda had hit the robe, its teeth had become imbedded in the cloth and by trying to get away it had pulled down Chan. Upon him it was now feasting.

Smoke shuddered and started to turn away, the thought in his mind that all he had gained by the encounter was the *Negrito* and the ownership of the *Witch* once more. But then, Chan had promised ten thousand dollars, and—

The beam licked greenly down

into the waves and caught a glimmer of white floating on the water. It was only idle curiosity which made Smoke turn and look more closely at the splotch.

WITH an oar he reached out and brought the object closer in toward the motorboat, to finally realize that it was what he had guessed it to be.

In his hand he held the wooden box which contained a half million dollars in black pearls!

Smoke smiled slowly and then looked back at the water as the irony of fate came home to him. By playing traitor, Chan had not only lost his pearls to the white trader, but had also lost his life.

The two Chamorros shook their battered heads and grinned as they rowed Smoke back to the waiting *Witch*.

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The GLOBE-TROTTER



AFRICA—Far trails through the brush. Heat stifling and intense rising from the dense growth of the jungle. A *safari* plodding along. Blacks loaded with the possession of the white men. Adventure!

India—Beaters seeking out man-eating tigers. Massive, lumbering elephants part of the hunt. Big game hunters riding in the *howdah* on the elephant's back. Adventure!

Alaska—Ice floes in the far north. Spring and the crash and roar of the bergs drifting south. Dog teams mushing over long miles of snow. Biting winds. Adventure!

Spring beckoning with the call of far places. We can't all go, but we can follow those distant trails, know the excitement and dangers in the pages of THRILLING ADVENTURES!

There has been adventure during the long cold winter, too. Plenty of it all over the world. From the hot countries to the South Pole men have gone right on facing death in their efforts to aid the cause of science. It's winter in Brazil—but seasons make little difference in that part of Brazil just under the equator known as Amazona, the home of the Jivaro Indians, the fierce headhunters of the upper Amazon.

All Indians Are Not Hostile

Frederick Murdock has written *Ye Olde Globe Trotter* requesting information concerning the different Indian tribes of the Amazon River and its tributaries.

Murdock wants to make a trip to the upper Amazon and cross over

the jungle and come out by way of the Orinoco in Venezuela. What is more, he wants to make the trip alone with only native Indians as guides, a seemingly very hazardous trip to undertake alone.

But, oddly, it is not nearly as dangerous in the Amazon jungle as some adventurers would have us believe. While there are many fierce Indian tribes in Brazil, there are also many tribes of friendly ones.

The Fierce Headhunters

In fact, those that are friendly outnumber the hostile ones considerably. But Murdock's letter had a catch in it. He wanted to make the trip alone, *but* he also wanted to look in upon the fierce headhunters, the Jivaros, and learn just what process they used in shrinking the severed heads of their enemies to such perfect miniature replicas of the originals.

FRANKLY, he expected too much. Going to the upper reaches of the Amazon to learn the Jivaro process for shrinking human heads is one thing. Making a solo expedition alone up the Amazon and Rio Negro rivers, crossing the small bit of intervening jungle, and going down the Orinoco to its mouth is another.

In that Murdock will probably choose to make the solo trip without going near the Jivaros, I am going to tell him how the Jivaros process the human heads of their enemies, as well as saying a little regarding the poison darts they use in their blow guns.

All of you regular readers of

THRILLING ADVENTURES learned a great deal about the ruthless Jivaros in that exciting novel by Allan K. Echols, *THE SERPENT OF MOPOI*, that appeared in the December issue, but even so Ye Olde Globe Trotter is going right ahead and tell you more.

An Art and a Science

Head shrinking is as much of an art as it is a science, and while it is somewhat repulsive to think of, we in the United States must remember that the native Indians of our own country used to go in for scalping of their enemies in a big way.

Head shrinking is just a further development of scalping. Whereas our North American Indians took only the scalp of his enemies as a trophy, the Jivaros of Brazil take his entire head. But in order to keep the mementoes of victory as perpetual tokens of their prowess, it is necessary to preserve them. Therein comes the science—and the art.

The North American Indian tanned his scalp just like he did an animal skin, by removing all the flesh and fatty tissue clinging to the skin, and then letting it dry. They shrank them to about a third their former size.

In the Amazon region directly under the equator it is much warmer and far more humid. To preserve an entire head by that method would be impossible, so the Jivaros have developed a very scientific method, scientific, despite the fact that they are a very primitive people otherwise.

The head is severed at the neck. Then the Jivaro grasps it by the hair and runs as fast as he can to his own *maloca*, where his squaw is waiting for him with a pot of boiling water.

Hot Water, Hot Stones, Hot Sand!

With the pot of boiling water ready and waiting for him, the victorious Jivaro warrior takes his head, parts the hair very carefully down the middle, then with his knife (for

which he has traded something usually a hundred times more valuable to some white trader) he incises the scalp from a point at the forehead, clean across the occipital to a point below the hair line at back of the neck.

This done, he grasps the hair on one side and carefully peels the scalp away with the point of his knife, pulling at the same time on the hair and applying a steady pressure. When one side is finished he repeats the process on the other. Now the entire skull is exposed and he starts to work on the face proper, carefully excising the ears and the points around the nose and mouth.

With all tendons and ligaments thus severed, the skull lifts out very simply through the spread scalp incision, and the Jivaro has left only the flesh and hair.

The incision on top is sewed up now, tightly. The nostrils are plugged up, the eyelids are propped open with little sticks. The opening of the mouth is closed, then the inside is filled with hot pebbles and coarse sand.

Thus far, we have described the scientific part of the job. Now comes the art. The Jivaro now shapes up the face and head as he remembers it. The sand and pebbles inside give body and substance to the stuffed head, and they afford malleability.

Works Like a Sculptor

THE Jivaro pushes, pulls, pinches, much as a sculptor would, working on clay until he gets the likeness he desires. Usually he adds somewhat to the real likeness by puffing out the nostrils, stretching the lips, etc., to make the resemblance more hideous and fierce looking. Thus he will have more pride when showing the finished product to his fellows, for the man he vanquished was very fierce and tough looking, thus proving his prowess in a greater degree. Yes, even the Jivaros have gone in for hokum.

With the face modeled up to his
(Continued on page 150)

MEN AND WOMEN
THE STRANGE
EXOTIC WORLD
OF TWILIGHT

THE THIRD SEX!
MAN OR WOMAN?
CAN YOU TELL
"THEM" FROM
OTHERS?



MYSTERIOUS FASCINATION ••

A Great Social Evil Uncovered



Now a Doctor has dared to tear away the veil of mystery that hides the facts behind homosexuality. In blunt understandable words he describes the unbelievable facts. "STRANGE LOVES. A Study in Sexual Abnormalities," by Dr. La Forest Potter, noted authority, is a document so weird, so startling, as to amaze the civilized world. Dr. Potter says, "NO MAN ON EARTH HAS A CHANCE AGAINST A WOMAN ONCE SHE HAS SUCCEDED TO ANOTHER WOMAN." A startling, provocative indictment against the false modesty that has been responsible for the growth of these fantastic strange amatory curiosities among savage and civilized races.

Dr. Potter tells about the hidden secret passions that dominate these women's exotic lives. He talks about the tragic duality of the effeminate man—half man—half woman. Fearlessly, openly, the meaning of many misunderstood subjects is brought under the searchlight of truth. Sadism—Necrophilia—Phallic Worship—Sodomy—Pederasty—Triadism—Saphism—Uranism—the normal man and woman will refuse to believe that such abnormalities exist and have been practiced through the ages.

For hundreds of years men and women have talked with hushed voices about "STRANGE PEOPLE"—men who are not men—women who are not women. No one has ever dared to talk out in the open about THE THIRD SEX. Is it any wonder that the shocking, lurid facts of this great social evil are unknown to the great mass of men and women? Because this subject is considered taboo, strange nick-names have arisen. "Furies, Pansies, Queers, Lesbians, Perverts"—these are but a few of the names used to describe these female men and male women.



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(Continued from page 148)

satisfaction, he next closes the hole at the neck. Then taking the head by the hair of the head he drops it in the boiling water and lets it simmer for a matter of hours. This is to work out all the fat remaining in the flesh.

The hot pebbles and sand inside serve the same purpose.

Yes; They're Cannibals!

AS the fat gathers on the surface of the water, the squaw skims it off with a palm ladle. You readers can guess what it is used for. It gives Ye Olde Glode Trotter the shivers to write about it. (Yes; the Jivaros are cannibals.)

This process goes on for several days. The prepared head simmers for awhile, the fat exudes. And ever so often the head is taken out, and fresh hot sand and hot pebbles are put back inside.

When no more fat gathers, the stewing part of the operation is finished. The head is then removed, refilled with more hot sand and pebbles, and then buried in the sand out where the sand is exposed to the hot tropical sun.

This is when the actual curing of the head really begins, and the shrinking. The water bath is just to get the fat out. The heat bath serves to do the curing. After several days of sand bathing, it comes time for the finishing touches.

The Jivaro then takes the head from the sand. By now it has begun to get hard. When the sand and pebbles inside are poured out it retains its form. The whole thing has become a dark brown color. More real hot pebbles are prepared now, and these are poured into the inverted head through the neck opening, not enough however to fill the head, just about one-quarter full.

The Jivaro then rolls these hot pebbles around inside like loose peas in a pod. The movement is to keep the pebbles from burning the drying flesh. This goes on for several hourly periods each day. Shrinking taking

place continually as it is dried more and more.

The Result

Finally, at the end of two weeks, the finished product is the result. A perfect miniature replica of the original, only about one-third the original size.

The Jivaro then usually mounts it on a stick, and after proudly displaying it to his fellow warriors, it goes to join the other trophies like it in his quarter of the tribal *maloca*.

That's all about the Jivaro head-hunters!

Oh, no! I promised one more secret. Here goes. I'll eat all the poison the Jivaros use to tip the darts of their blow gun arrows, and get up and walk away from the feast. Yet, the poison is supposed to be the most deadly ever concocted by man.

It is! Killing instantly—but, only when it comes directly in contact with the blood stream. Anyone can eat it without harm. Only don't let it touch your lips if you have what the advertisers call "pink tooth-brush."

No Pain Is Felt

IT is a peculiar poison, bringing on complete anaesthesia as soon as it touches an open wound. The dart, of course, makes that. Immediate sleep and death follows. No pain, no worry, no nothing.

So, it doesn't make much difference what the Jivaros do with your head afterward.

You don't know about it, anyway.

On page 152 you'll find another list of names of some of the charter members of the *Globe Trotters Club*—next month I'll print more. So that you'll know just who and where your fellow members are.

Join At Once

You readers of THRILLING ADVENTURES who haven't sent in your applications for membership should do so at once. Clip the ap-

(Continued on page 152)

WANTED MEN FOR TEA and COFFEE ROUTES

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simply take care of customers' orders on the route in your locality. You collect all the cash and keep a big share of it just for looking after the orders, delivering the goods, and taking care of the business. I furnish you with hundreds of fine premiums and special bargain offers—premiums to give away with Tea, Coffee, Spices, Extracts, Baking Powder and other fine products. Hundreds are now waiting to be served in many localities. Daily and weekly earnings mount steadily where you call on your route regularly.

YOUR OWN FOOD PRODUCTS AT WHOLESALE PRICES

When I send you instructions for making money on my new neighborhood Tea and Coffee Route Plan I also give you rock-bottom wholesale prices on your own groceries and household necessities. This is in addition

to your regular daily earnings, so you make big money in cash and save big money on the things you use in your home.

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My new plan provides immediate cash earnings. As long as you are honest and reliable you are eligible for one of these routes. I want some one in every territory because I have opened up my big plant to full capacity. I am going to help a lot more people earn more money at once. You can have one of these good paying routes right in your own locality right near where you live. Better send name today.

EXPERIENCE OR TRAINING UNNECESSARY

I am not nearly as much interested in your past experience as I am in your willingness to follow a few plain instructions that will tell you the inside workings of this profitable business. I will explain just how you go about placing Tea, Coffee, Spices, Extracts and Household Products with the customers on your route. I furnish everything there is no stock to carry—you fill your orders from my big factory stock. You have entire charge of everything.

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If you have been working for a boss and your pay has been limited and you are weary of pinching and striving to exist, here's an opportunity to change all this. With my route plan you can stop time-



clock pinching forever. If you want earnings that run up to \$42.50 a week you can have them. Your weekly income is limited only by the time you give to the business. The more time you devote to my wonderful Route Plan the more money you make for yourself. That's the kind of an offer I am making to you.

LOOK AT THESE UNUSUAL EARNINGS

I am receiving glowing reports from both men and women who are already handling some of these routes. M. Mitchell, Cal., reported profits of \$75.00 in six days. Wm. E. Berkshire, Pa., cleared \$20.00 in one day and \$30.00 in a week. Wm. H. Newcomb, N. Y., made \$24.00 in one day. Wm. E. Walker, Conn., made \$88.00 during spare time in three days. I have many more reports like these exceptional earnings. I now offer you an even better opportunity than I gave to them.

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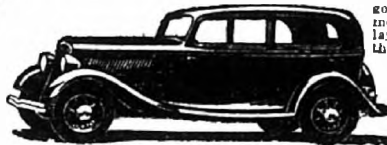
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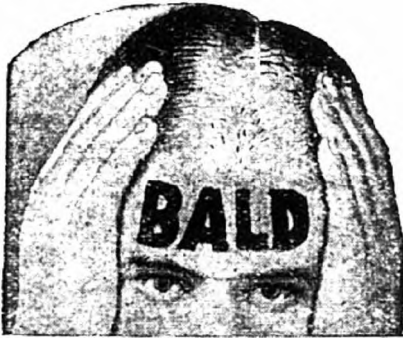
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WHY MEN GO



Science Finds New Way to Remove Germ Cause and Activate Dormant Roots to Grow New Hair

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A germ called "Flask Bacilla of Unna" gets deep into the scalp skin in many cases of abnormal hair deficiency, causing a most dangerous type of dandruff. It clogs up pores and hair follicles, causing itchy scalp, falling hair and prevents dormant hair roots (papilla) from growing new hair. The germ is seldom suspected. Washing and shampooing and use of tonics, ointments and lotions don't remove the cause. They merely cleanse and treat the surface and roll off the outer skin like water rolls off the back of a duck. No wonder baldness is increasing.

Now a new discovery enables people who have dandruff, falling hair, thin hair and baldness to harmlessly remove the congested, thin outer layer of scalp skin. This permits opened pores to breathe in air, sunshine and absorb a penetrating, stimulating scalp-food to activate the smothered dormant hair roots and grow new hair. It is the most sensational discovery in the history of falling hair and baldness. It is all explained in a new treatise called "GROW HAIR," showing "anatomy of your hair" and tells what to do. This treatise is now being mailed FREE to all who write for it. Send no money, just name and address to Dermolav Lab., Desk 516, No 1700 Broadway, New York, N. Y., and you get it by return mail free and postpaid. If pleased, tell your friends about it.

LADIES ONLY!

DELAYED? Use famous time-tested B-X MONTHLY RELIEF COMBINATION! Brings soothing, satisfying relief to some of the loudest, most stubborn, unseasonal delays very quickly—in only a few hours in some cases! Very powerful, yet absolutely safe! **GUARANTEED—PURE—HARMLESS.** No pain, inconvenience, or interference with duties! Consultation is strongly recommended by famous doctors! Used and praised by thousands of grateful women! Double Strength, 50¢ **AMAZINGLY PROMPT SHIPMENT!** Rushed in clean mail, plain sealed wrapper, within 1 hour of receipt of order. **B-X LABORATORIES, 1515 E. 60th St., N-5 Chicago**



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Let me arrange a romantic correspondence for you. Find yourself a sweetheart thru America's foremost select social correspondence club. A friendship letter society for lonely ladies and gentlemen. Members everywhere; **CONFIDENTIAL** introductions by letter; efficient, dignified and continuous service. I have made thousands of lonely people happy—why not you? Write for **FREE** sealed particulars. **EVAN MCGEE, P. O. BOX 08a JACKSONVILLE, FLORIDA**

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Until You Try This Wonderful Treatment

For pile suffering. If you have piles in any form write for a **FREE** sample of Page's Pile Tablets and you will bless the day that you read this. Write today. **E. R. Page Co., 2345-O, Page Bldg., Marshall, Mich.**

(Continued from page 150)

plication blank appearing on page 156 of this magazine, sign it, enclose with it a stamped self-addressed envelope and mail it if you want a handsome membership card entitling you to all the rights and privileges of a charter member in this unique, world-wide organization with members all over the earth.

There are no obligations, no dues, no qualifications necessary for membership except a whole-hearted interest in adventure and a willingness to exchange information with fellow members.

One of our authors was down in South Africa when that big diamond you read about in the papers was found by a poor Dutch farmhand and his *Kaffir* helper. He writes to us concerning same.

Dear Globe Trotter:—Say, boy, the excitement in this neck of the African woods
(Continued on page 154)

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Coast-to-Coast Success!

OPPORTUNITY TO MAKE

OF UP TO \$ **60** TO \$ **300** A WEEK
AT HOME



NO HOUSE-TO-HOUSE CANVASSING

Experience Unnecessary—No Costly Machine to Buy

The new coast-to-coast food hit. You work at home, chips come to you already made. Simply drop into hot grease and they're ready to eat! No complicated work, no experience, no failures! Opportunity to make up to \$30 first day, and high as \$60 to \$300 a week clear! Not a machine: No need to buy special equipment. Stores do your selling for you. A phenomenal success! Sells faster than potato chips, do-nuts. Magic Cheese Chips are big, fluffy, giant-size chips, bigger than potato chips. Irresistible taste makes them act like an appetizer. The more you eat, the more you want to eat, and you never get filled up! It's a revelation! Crowds, Maine to California, devouring thousands of pounds weekly!

Pays Distributors Tremendous Profits

An enormous profit on a small investment! Everyone likes this tasty tidbit any time of the day. 5 and 10 cent bags of Magic Cheese Chips sell like wildfire!

MEN, WOMEN EVERYWHERE
Start at Scratch, Build Up
to 1,000 Pound a Month Businesses

Men and women succeed alike—no super-salesmanship—no skill—no canvassing. E. Weiler, California, starts with 10 pounds, uses profits to build up to 30 pounds, then 60 pounds, then places standing order for 150 pounds EVERY THREE DAYS! ALL PAID FOR OUT OF PROFITS! One of the largest bakery chain systems in the U. S. bids for exclusive rights in 100 cities, but we had already allowed exclusive rights to others, except in 9 cities, which they grab eagerly. Buy 150 pounds at a clip for each store! J. F. Knudson, living in a small New York city, wires, "RUSH ONE HUNDRED TWENTY POUNDS. OUR TRADE WILL REQUIRE UPWARD OF FIVE HUNDRED POUNDS MONTHLY." Large Pacific Coast concern wires, "INCREASE STANDING ORDER TO ONE HUNDRED FIFTY POUNDS WEEKLY. SHIP TODAY SURE THIRTY POUNDS ADDITIONAL EXPRESS." Long distance calls, telegrams flooding in from everywhere—we've had our plant working overtime to meet the demand! No hard times for MAGIC CHEESE CHIPS!

YOU DON'T INVEST A RED CENT

until you have sold yourself on the possibilities. You must sell yourself first before we permit you to invest, and our novel plan enables you to decide without cost! Then you can start with \$8.50 investment, put back the enormous profits, building up without another penny investment if you wish!

EVERYTHING FURNISHED

We furnish everything—advertising, display stands, etc. Don't wait until it's too late to get the FIRST BIG PROFITS in your locality. Mail the coupon at once for complete details and share the enormous profits immediately!

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NEW NOW!

The Smash Hit of the day! The big fad at parties, outdoor games. People everywhere munching 'em on the streets! Takes instantly. Biggest food novelty boom in years!

VIRGIN TERRITORY EVERYWHERE

Hundreds of successful businesses now operating. Thousands of open territories. Hundreds of cities open—thousands of small towns. Immediate success possible anywhere. Write today.

SEND for ACTUAL PHOTO-COPIES of ORDERS from MAGIC CHIP DEALERS

Bonafide Proof of Profits!

See the actual orders with which men and women with small capital start, then see the orders they send out of profits! No claims. We let the facts speak for themselves. Look into this now while you have FIRST CHANCE at the profits in your locality. No obligation. Mail the coupon immediately—later may be too late.



MAIL FOR COMPLETE DETAILS

FLUFF-O MFG. CO.
Dept. 2023-N
St. Louis, Mo.

Without obligation to me, rush full information at once about Magic Cheese Chips and your proposition.

Name.....

Address.....

ANY PHOTO ENLARGED

Size 2 1/2 inches or smaller if desired. Same price for full length or bust form, groups, landscapes, pet animals, etc., or enlargements of any part of group picture. Safe return of original photo guaranteed.

47c **SEND NO MONEY** Just mail photo of snapshot (any size) and within a week you will receive your beautiful (7x11) enlargement, guaranteed finished. Pay postage 47c of no postage—or send 47c with order and we pay postage. Big 12x20-inch enlargement sent C. O. D. 75c plus postage or send 87c and we pay postage. Take advantage of this exclusive offer now. Send your photos today. Speeds also wanted.



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are simply marvelous. Used for 38 years by millions of men who sought youthful vigor, pep and energy. Don't experiment, but be safe, sure and satisfied. 45-day package, triple strength, \$2—Three Boxes, \$5. SPECIAL STRENGTH (for severe cases), \$3—Two Boxes, \$5. C. O. D. add 15c. Plain wrapper. Money Back if not pleased. (Agents Wanted.)

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Pep!

FROM OUR SANCTUM

- ☛ The May issues of our companion magazines are brimful of the best novels, stories and features to be found anywhere.
- ☛ Just pick up **THRILLING DETECTIVE**—and thrill to Norman A. Danels' great book-length mystery, **THE WITCH'S MURDERS**. Also, **DEATH CHECKS IN**, an action-packed novelette by George Allan Moffat, and many distinctive short stories of crime. 10c.
- ☛ In the **PHANTOM DETECTIVE**, the exciting exploits of Richard Curtis Van Loan are given in **THE CRIMSON KILLER**, a full book-length novel packed with speed and suspense from start to finish. 10c at all stands.
- ☛ **SKY FIGHTERS** for May features **WINGS OF CHIVALRY**, a novel-length yarn by Jack Straley—novelette and stories by Ralph Oppenheim, Arthur J. Burke and others—and the most profuse array of features to be found in any air magazine. 10c.
- ☛ For the air minded: **THUNDERING WINGS** by Lieut. Scott Morgan, is the featured full book-length novel in **THE LONE EAGLE**—a magazine devoted to the adventures of John Masters, Fighting Ace of the Secret Service. Zooming features and stories. 10c.
- ☛ For love stories of the ranch and range, read **THRILLING RANCH STORIES**. **BRANDED HEARTS**, a novel by Lawrence A. Kenting, tops a list of exciting, rip-roaring stories with a real Western romantic thrill in every line. 15c at all stands.
- ☛ For sis and mom: Bring home **THRILLING LOVE**—they'll love it. This month's featured book length novel is **BRIDE KIDNAPPED**, by Marcello Lathrop. 10c at all stands.

—THE PUBLISHER.

(Continued from page 152)

(only there aren't any woods) is something to write home about. Another huge diamond has just been found in the alluvial wash of the Transvaal. While I haven't seen the thing, I hear that it is almost as big as the Cullinan and worth between a quarter and a half-million dollars.

As soon as word of its discovery got bruited about everyone in this town, including me, made a dash for the new fields. When I got there the desert was thick as flypaper with all manner of humans.

I spent three days in the wash and got nothing but a headache and sore feet, but some of the diamond pickers did pick up small specimens.

However, what they were all searching for was the other half of the big diamond the Dutchman and the kaffir found. It seems that it was split in half, or rather the part found was just half of what was once a stone even larger than the Cullinan. In that no stone with the definite cleavage of the one found has ever been uncovered, seekers have naturally assumed that the other half lies somewhere in the area of this wash which extends for several thousand square miles.

I would like to kick it up, but three days looking in the blazing heat just about ruined me. Besides, I was never lucky in finding things anyway. So, I have decided to leave the finding of the other half to somebody else. I did, however, get a knockout idea for a story out of said experience. And soon as I get back to Johannesburg, I will start pounding it out.

Hope to see you some time this summer. I am going up to Madagascar, stay there awhile, then hope to get a tramp that will deposit me, bag and baggage, and typewriter all in one shipment right at the docks of Manhattan without a stop.

Captain Kerry McRoberts.

Johannesburg, South Africa.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Dear Globe Trotter:—In a late issue of **THRILLING ADVENTURES** I read your article about cold weather including statistics. I also saw in an Almanac an account of cold weather, which to my mind seems the more reasonable.

The Almanac referred to says that at Verkhoyansk in Northern Siberia, on January 15, 1885, the mercury dropped to 90.4 degrees Fahrenheit below zero.

Your record shows a temperature of 186 degrees Fahrenheit below zero.

Now, Mr. Globe Trotter, somebody is wrong. Clarence W. Arrington.

Pilot Mountain, N. C.

Answer:—Well, Clarence, both are

(Continued on page 156)

MENDS WITHOUT SEWING

6 REPAIRS for 1¢



SEW-NO-MORE PAYS AGENTS UP TO \$2.00 an HOUR

SEW-NO-MORE is the amazing product with which a hole, rip or tear in any cotton, wool or silk fabric can be mended so perfectly that you can hardly find the mended place. Stockings, dresses, shirts, underwear, overalls, draperies, linens—in fact, anything made of cloth—can be kept in perfect repair without the tedious, eye-straining work of mending or darning with needle and thread. Simply spread a little Sew-No-More around the edges of the hole or tear, place a piece of the same material over the Sew-No-More and press together lightly. In a few seconds the Sew-No-More dries, and the mend is complete—it becomes a part of the article itself. Boiling, washing, ironing won't hurt it. Housewives—especially mothers—find in Sew-No-More just the thing to keep the children's clothes neatly mended—and without the hard work. It is a boon to bachelors because it allows them to make their own repairs without troublesome sewing or outside help.



BEFORE USING SEW-NO-MORE

Here is an actual photograph of a dainty dress that was practically ruined by a burn if mended by the old needle and thread method. It would no longer be fit for good wear.



AFTER USING SEW-NO-MORE

Here is a photograph of the same dress mended with Sew-No-More. See how neat the repair is. No need now to lay this dress aside, because you can't tell that a repair has been made.

Here's How Users Talk About Sew-No-More
Sew No-More is a fine invention. It does everything you claim for it. It is a pleasure to recommend it to my friends and neighbors. Charles B. Hinton, Buffalo, Pa.

Have used Sew No More on many different articles and it has proved to be both fast, washable and can be ironed. Miss Laurean Easton, 217 Wabash Ave., Belleville, Ill.

You're right, Sew No-More does away with the old needle and thread. It's a wonderful product in every way. Mrs. John Michalski, 75 Littlefield Ave., Buffalo, N. Y.

For quick neat mends that last, Sew No-More can't be beat. Fabrics I repaired with it have been washed and ironed—even rubbed hard on a wash board, and they don't come off. Miss Henry Pfler, 132 John St., Hudson Falls, N. Y.

MAIL COUPON FOR FREE SAMPLE
Rush your name and address for FREE sample to prove all claims, and special agent's territory offer. I will show you how other men and women without experience are making up to \$2.00 in an hour with this amazing product that sells to nine out of every ten prospects and pays you up to 217% profit. Wonderful FREE Demonstration Quilt and FREE SIZES PLANS that GUARANTEE your success. No investment necessary. Mail coupon today. R. B. Bullman, President

Repairs Don't Show

SEW-NO-MORE is a scientific, stainless cream with powerful adhesive qualities. It is easy to use. Anyone can make repairs that are neat, permanent, practically invisible. Even striped material or material with checks or patterns can be mended so that the repair doesn't show. Every tube is sold under a MONEY BACK GUARANTEE OF SATISFACTION.

Saves Fine Garments

SEW-NO-MORE saves money because it mends fine garments and other valuable articles that would otherwise be ruined through a rip, tear or burn which could not be darned or mended by the old fashioned, ugly way. In stockings and socks a Sew-No-More mend is smooth—no lumps to hurt the foot.



BOIL IT!



WASH IT!



IRON IT!

MENDS WILL NOT COME OFF

Repairs made with Sew No-More wear as long as the rest of the garment. They can be laundered hundreds of times. They can be boiled, washed and ironed—they will not come off.

Sew No-More repairs are PERMANENT. LOOK BETTER and are STRONGER than mends made with needle and thread. The family mending can be done with Sew-No-More in one tenth the usual time.

\$3,000 a Year For This Salesman

"This confirms my telegram for another 38 dozen Sew-No-More. I should be able soon to dispose of at least 100 dozen a week. I am starting out sales crews in various towns. I have set my goal at \$5,000 a year PROFIT and I am after that \$5,000." B. N. Waterhouse, Pa.

Good For FREE SAMPLE

R. B. Bullman, President SEW-NO-MORE Company, Dept. T-786, Madison Road, Cincinnati, Ohio.

Yes, I am interested in SEW-NO-MORE. Send me at once FREE Sample to prove your claims, FREE outfit and territory offer. Also, tell me how other men and women are making up to \$2.00 in an hour.

Name

Address

City

State

Territory interested in

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 BE OUR REPRESENTATIVE
 EARN UP TO \$40 A WEEK
 No experience needed to act as our representative for Master Wash Garments. Every business concern prospect. You receive pay daily in cash, commissions. Advertising embroidered on garments is a big sales feature. Write at once for FREE complete selling outfit. Geo. Master Garment Co., Dept. 480, Ligonier, Ind.

FOREST JOBS

Easily available. \$125—\$200 per month. Permanent. Cabin, hunt, trap, patrol. Get details immediately.

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A BABY FOR YOU?

If you are denied the blessing of a baby all your own and yearn for a baby's arms and a baby's smile, do not give up hope. Just write in confidence to Mrs. Mildred Owens, 1632 Cotter House, Kansas City, Mo., and she will tell you about a simple home method that helped her after being denied 15 years. Many others say this has helped bless their lives. Write now and try for this wonderful happiness.

Vim—Vigor—Vitality

Men—Women—Regain that lost pep that enlivens you to the opposite sex. Our new **FULLER PEPPY TONIQUE TABLETS** will help you to rejuvenate your sexual weakness, tired, worn-out nerves, strength, etc. The wonderful results from using these tablets will surprise you. Sent sealed, plain wrapper, prepaid. \$2.00 cash or \$2.15 C.O.D. Special strength containing a special product for use in severe cases. \$3.00. Satisfaction guaranteed or money refunded.

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SEE WITHOUT GLASSES

Natural Eyesight System Makes Them Unnecessary
 Now Used in over 30 Countries

Send for FREE information telling how Revolutionary Invention makes it easy to correct Nearsight, Farsight, Astigmatism, Eyestrain, Weak Eyes, Failing Vision, Old Age Sight, Eye Muscle Trouble, Etc., at home without glasses.

NATURAL EYESIGHT INSTITUTE, Inc.
 Dept. 48-A Santa Monica, Calif.

(Continued from page 154)

right, Ye Olde Globe Trotter and the Almanac. Only we used different languages, so to speak. I gave the temperature in degrees *Centigrade*, and the Almanac gave it in degrees *Fahrenheit*. You overlooked that salient difference I am afraid, and there is a big difference in the scale. Both figures work out to the same degree of actual cold. It all depends on what scale you use. The *Centigrade* scale is used in Siberia and for all scientific purposes.

Dear Globe Trotter:—From reading your columns in **THRILLING ADVENTURES** I see that you are somewhat of an expert on weather phenomena. Well, I ran into a funny sight in Boston Harbor this winter that put me to guessing. It was a sort of fog, but differing from fog, it rose up from the harbor waters in sort of twisting spirals like smoke weaving up

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100 Pages of America's Best Wit and Humor—Realistic, Fast-Moving Short Stories—**COLLEGE LIFE** is the last word in sophistication and the best quarter's worth on the stands today!

Application for Membership

The Globe Trotter,
THRILLING ADVENTURES,
 570 Seventh Ave.,
 New York City.

I wish to be enrolled as a member of the *Globe Trotters Club*. I am interested in adventure and will endeavor to answer all questions asked me by other members regarding the places with which I am familiar.

(Print name plainly)

Address

City..... State.....

My hobbies are.....

..... Age.....

To obtain a membership card, enclose \$.84 a self-addressed stamped envelope.

into the sky where it cuts off abruptly like it was sheared with a knife.

I have never seen such a sight before, and people I talked with who also saw it, said it was the first time for them, also.

Could you explain the reason for it?

Chester Morris.

Lawrence, Mass.

Answer:—Well, Chester, you saw something that perhaps you won't see again for many a year—unless you make a trip to the polar regions. That strange fog you saw was what the Arctic and Antarctic explorers call frost mist. It is caused by cold air above meeting warm water below. This frost mist is very common in the polar regions, but seldom seen in the temperate zones.

This winter it was especially cold for short periods along the Atlantic seaboard, and the cold came so suddenly that the water didn't have a chance to warm in its usual ratio. This caused the frost mist to rise up from the surface of the water like steam. It was cut off abruptly at a certain height because of the atmospheric pressure.

The frost mist is so thick in Arctic climes that it is impossible to travel for days at a time. Even so, it is one of the most beautiful of Arctic sights, especially just when the sun is rising. Then it waves and undulates like a thin, gossamer curtain, fairy-like in the extreme.

Hope the explanation sets you clear, Chester. But you were not the only one that noticed that peculiar fog this year. It extended clear down to the Virginian capes this last winter, the first time it was ever noticed there.

This next fellow has an entirely different question. It's a far cry from frost mist to the old highwaymen of Merrie England, but Ye Olde Globe Trotter covers lots of territory and no questions are barred.

Dear Globe Trotter:—I have a short simple question to ask you. I have read a lot about one Dick Turpin, who was supposed to be the King of Bandits. I am wondering if he was a real character or just a legendary figure like Robin

(Concluded on page 158)

Stomach Disorders Threatened His Life Says N.Y. Patrolman



David R. Caldwell.

"I tried everything," says Officer David R. Caldwell, 910 Jennings St., New York City. "I suffered from gas in the stomach and heartburn so bad that I could hardly stand it. My case was diagnosed by one doctor as ulcers. I suffered much agony and lost weight until one day I saw an advertisement in the New York Daily News, by the Udga Co., St. Paul, Minn. I wrote for their treatment and thanks be to God I did, for today I am a different man. I have no pain, can eat anything and I am getting back to my normal weight."

Acid Stomach Afflicts Millions

Hyperacidity (acid stomach), is, as every physician can tell you, the curse of millions. It is the most common cause of stomach or gastric ulcers as well as many other distressing conditions, and there are comparatively few adults who can truly say it has never troubled them. In addition to stomach ulcers, acid stomach is often the direct cause of gas pains, dyspepsia, poor digestion, pains after eating, bloating, belching, gnawing pains, heartburn, sour stomach, constipation, etc.

Double Acting Treatment Needed

To combat these conditions you need a treatment that will first counteract or neutralize the excess acid secretions and then protect, soothe and tone the membranes or stomach lining in order that the process of healing may take place. This is the function of the Udga Treatment and the excellent results it has produced in so many thousands of cases are due to this double acting feature. For stomach ulcer victims, the Udga treatment includes a diet list prepared by a world-famous clinical hospital.

**Offered On
15 DAYS TRIAL**

And now that the merits of this splendid treatment have been so conclusively indicated, the distributors invite all sufferers to try it at their risk and are willing to send a full 15-DAY TREATMENT ON TRIAL. So if you can believe what your own stomach tells you—if you agree that freedom from stomach pains, distress and misery are the surest proof of results, accept this liberal trial offer and see for yourself what the Udga Treatment can do.

--- MAIL COUPON TODAY ---
UDGA, Inc., 2406 Foot-Schulze Bldg.,
St. Paul, Minnesota.

Please send me your 15-DAY TRIAL OFFER on the Udga Treatment. Also free copy of your book on stomach troubles, testimonials, affidavit of genuineness and \$1,000.00 Reward Offer to back it up. This does not obligate me in any way.

Name _____
No. and Street _____
City _____ State _____

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19x4 40-21

Firestone Goodrich
GOOD YEAR
U.S. AND OTHER TIRES

NEW LOW PRICES
Here are today's lowest prices on tires of proven quality... increasing thousands of satisfied motorists know by experience that standard brand tires reconstructed by the modern scientific Midland process are best.

Chicago's oldest, most reliable rubber company positively guaranteed for 15 months service under severest road conditions.

50% TO 60% MORE SERVICE

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Size Rim	Tires Tubes	Size Rim	Tires Tubes
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30x4 30 20	2.35 0.65	30x3 34	2.25 0.75
30x4 30 21	2.40 0.70	31x4 34	1.98 0.56
30x4 36 19	2.48 0.66	32x4 34	2.98 0.85
30x4 36 20	2.50 0.66	32x4 34	2.98 0.85
30x4 36 19	2.55 0.71	32x4 34	3.15 1.15
30x4 36 20	2.58 0.75	32x4 34	3.48 1.15
30x4 36 21	2.60 0.75	31x4 34	3.48 1.15
30x4 36 22	2.65 0.80	30x4 34	3.68 1.35
30x4 36 23	2.70 0.85	32x4 34	3.75 1.45
30x4 36 24	2.75 0.90		
30x4 36 25	2.80 0.95		
30x4 36 26	2.85 1.00		
30x4 36 27	2.90 1.05		
30x4 36 28	2.95 1.10		
30x4 36 29	3.00 1.15		
30x4 36 30	3.05 1.20		
30x4 36 31	3.10 1.25		
30x4 36 32	3.15 1.30		
30x4 36 33	3.20 1.35		
30x4 36 34	3.25 1.40		
30x4 36 35	3.30 1.45		
30x4 36 36	3.35 1.50		
30x4 36 37	3.40 1.55		
30x4 36 38	3.45 1.60		
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(Concluded from page 157)

Hood? Can you set me straight on this?
Bob Priest.

Arlington, Oregon.

Answer:—Well, Bob, you can bet your last shilling that Bad Dick Turpin was a real he-man and no legendary figure at all. If the ghosts of the many rich merchants and travelers he used to lay in wait for around the bend of the old English roads could talk, they would give you plenty of proof as to his reality.

He and his famous horse, Black Bess, roamed the English countryside and wreaked havoc on all rich travelers. Turpin was the man who was responsible for the word *highwayman* creeping into our language.

He was the first road bandit, and was very real, but did have many Robin Hood qualities. He robbed the rich and gave to the poor, and for that reason in many regions of England and Wales, his name is oft revered even in this day.

So much for that, Bob. It's too bad we don't have more bandits like Dick Turpin now. We have plenty of bandits, but none of them seem to share their ill-gotten gains with the poor, spending it all on themselves.

More T. N. T. and concentrated, smashing yarns are coming up in the next issue. If you liked this month's **THRILLING ADVENTURES**, as you certainly must have, don't miss buying the next issue the minute it appears on the stands.

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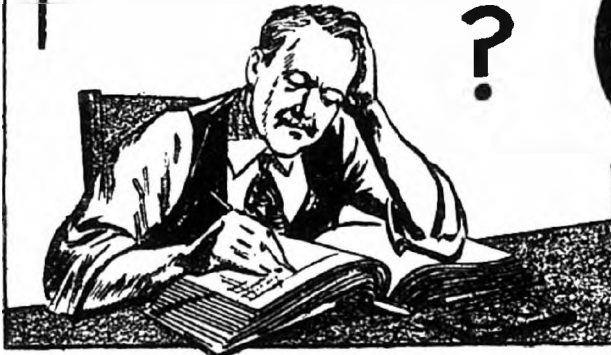


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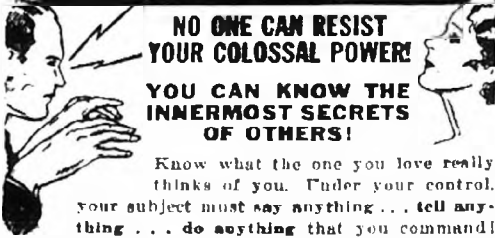
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RUBBER COMES HIGH

(Concluded from page 131)

It would take several men to manage the craft, to bring it and its cargo safely out of the lagoon and down to Manaos. But those needed men would come to Silva Simoes with Luis. Cleve had foreseen just such an emergency and had planned for it in his order to Willoughby.

From a storeroom, Cleve unearthed a shirt to cover his body. He washed himself and ate a frugal breakfast. Then he called the Witotos about him. "This," he said, indicating the scow—"and all it contains is mine. I go by canoe to Silva Simoes. Soon I will return. Until then you will guard all closely. And for that, and what you did for me last night, there will be presents, many rich presents for all in your tribe. And there will be salt—much salt."

At this the Witotos stirred and their black eyes gleamed. Salt was the greatest treasure in the world to them. Cleve knew that when he returned, the scow and its contents would be exactly as he left them.

He got into a small dugout tethered at the stern of the scow, pushed off and lifted the paddle. His glance went over the scow, over the circle on the shore, where death had stalked savagely but a few hours before. There was nothing there now but the patch of dead ashes where the fire had burned.

Yet it seemed to Cleve that he could still see the bodies of Salazar and his men, twisted and silent. It seemed he could also see Jack Trenholm, his face white and pained. And there was Alcides and the rest who had died, faithful to their trust.

He swept a gaunt hand across his eyes, turned away and dug in the paddle. He spoke, harshly, bitterly.

"Rubber," he said—"costs like hell."

ASTHMA was Strangling her



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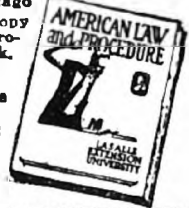
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CHAPTER V GIRL AUTOMOBILE GYPS—GIRLS WHO ASK FOR A HITCH—WITH STRANGE CONSEQUENCES—AND THE GAMBLING RACKET	CHAPTER IX JUST DOWN FROM COLLEGE—A COLLEGIATE MANNER, AN AIR OF NON-CHALANCE AND PLENTY OF NERVE ARE THE STOCK-IN-TRADE OF CERTAIN UNSCRUPULOUS RACKETEERS
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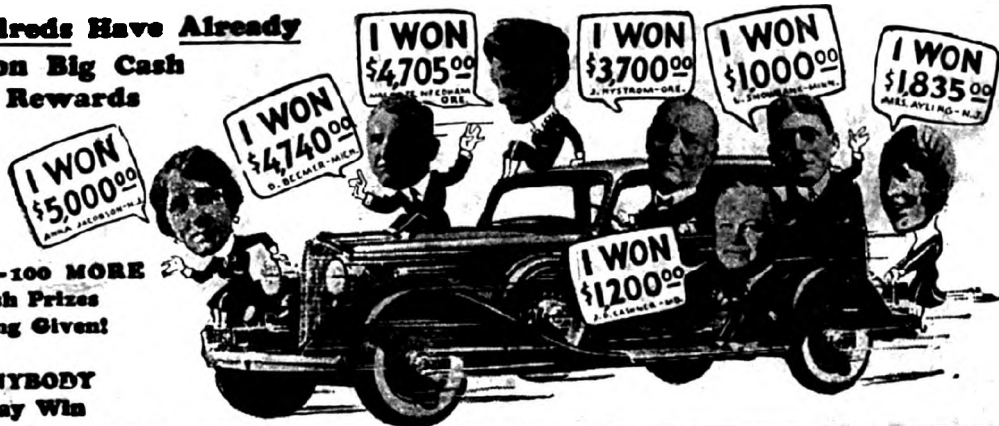
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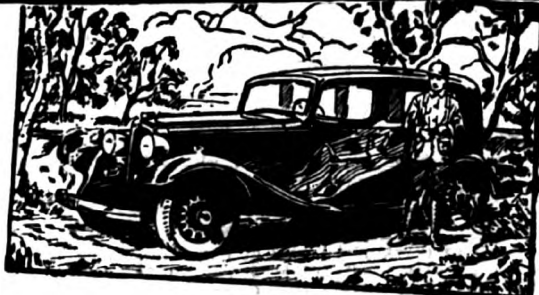


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Merrold Johnson, Prize Manager,
 Dept. 1250, Des Moines, Iowa.
 I have found 4 hunting dogs in your picture and I am anxious to win.
 Name.....
 Address.....
 City..... State.....
 (Mark in square which you would prefer to win.)
 Buick and \$1,000.00. or \$2,500.00 All Cash.
 Des Moines Iowa